

In Austrvegr

*The Role of the Eastern Baltic in Viking Age
Communication across the Baltic Sea*



Marika Mägi



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*The Role of the Eastern Baltic in Viking Age
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By

Marika Mägi



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Cover illustration: An early 9th-century crossbow-brooch found together with a number of weapons in Haljala, northern Estonia in 2016. Such large brooches were widespread ornaments of Baltic Finnic and Baltic warriors. This specimen is decorated with Nordic animal style art. The ornament is partly re-drawn by Indrek Jets. Photograph by Indrek Jets and Kasmu Museum, Estonia.

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“He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past.”

GEORGE ORWELL, 1984



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Preface and Acknowledgements

The idea to write this book was born on one sunny spring day 2010 among the ruins of Roma Abbey on Gotland, which I was visiting in connection with a conference in Visby. For my speech at the conference, I had just gathered together what I knew of Viking Age east–west communication in the areas of what are now the Baltic States. Doing this, interpretational differences in how to treat archaeological evidence in each of the Eastern Baltic countries stood out, and written sources did not always fit with the picture based on archaeological material. Writing a book seemed a good idea for explaining the backgrounds for such observations without being restricted by the normally very limited scope of articles. For talking of the Eastern Baltic, quite a space is needed – so varied and generally unknown to an international audience is the prehistory of the region.

Archaeologists coming from surrounding countries frequently fail to perceive the great cultural variability of the Viking Age Eastern Baltic. It is common that one argument is used from one, another from another district from this region, thus creating an odd, in reality non-existent “Baltic average”. I dare to assume that cultural regions towards the east, west, and south of the Eastern Baltic were really characterised by more far-reaching homogeneity in their material culture, being at the same time geographically larger than the present-day Baltic States. Co-existence of variable and often quite distinct cultures in the comparatively restricted area along the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea has apparently come as a surprise to several researchers from neighbouring countries.

When I started to write this book, I had been engaged in teaching archaeology at Tallinn University for several years, and had put together and run several courses on Baltic, Finnish, and Scandinavian Iron Age archaeology. The general overview of countries and areas in the Viking Age Baltic Rim seemed to be sufficient; the weakest link was, as I thought, archaeology in north-west Russia, in which I considered my knowledge somewhat unsystematic. Still, the ability to read most of the necessary languages, even though not all, encouraged me to attempt to write anyway. I was born and grew up in northern Estonia, and therefore have been able to communicate in Finnish for most of my life, too. For the last decade of my life, on the other hand, I have lived mainly in Denmark because of my Danish-Estonian family, and the Danish language also helps me to understand texts written in Swedish or Norwegian without any particular problems. My Latvian is very poor but, in this, several of my archaeology-interested Latvian friends have been of great help. The weakest

link in my language abilities when writing this book was Lithuanian, so that I was quite often forced to rely upon summaries in English, German, or Russian for texts that were originally written in Lithuanian.

As for Viking Age east-west communication on the Baltic Sea, Lithuania was mainly included through its coastal area, Couronia. The majority of issues that concerned the developing Grand Duchy of Lithuania involved Eastern or Central European connections, which are hardly treated in this study. In practice, the book does not embrace the whole area of the present-day Baltic States. Most attention is paid to the area of Estonia and Latvia, while from Lithuania only Couronia is included. Finland is covered quite extensively, and some attention is also paid to former Prussia, the present-day Oblast of Kaliningrad.

Although I have tried to pay proportionate attention to all regions on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, readers can perhaps sense that areas once inhabited by Baltic Finnic peoples have been covered somewhat more thoroughly. This is presumably partly caused by my language abilities, but certainly also by the fact that, when looking at Viking Age east-west communication in a broader context, the role of ethnic Balts seems to have been less conspicuous than that of Baltic Finnic peoples. This was an aspect that I was surprised by myself as I began writing the book, since Couronia in particular has frequently been pointed out as the most relevant region in the Eastern Baltic when discussing connections with Scandinavia. The reasons and circumstances behind this opinion have been thoroughly analysed on the following pages.

The role of Baltic Finnic peoples in the formation of eastern Viking networks is something that has nearly always been mentioned by researchers dealing with the subject, but which has not so far merited a complex and trans-regional study. One of the reasons for this is obviously the pre-Viking and Viking Age burial custom among most of the Baltic Finns. Only very few 7th- to mid-10th-century burial places with just occasional grave goods are known, especially from Estonia and the Baltic Finnic part of Latvia, which is in clear contrast with the numerous burial grounds and abundant grave goods of ethnic Balts of the same period, but also of Finns on some particular, mainly coastal regions. In this general impression of few artefacts, several other archaeological sites and criteria have not attracted the attention they deserve, for instance the appearance and development of hill-forts along the Estonian coasts or conspicuously numerous coin hoards, especially in Estonia. The proper observation of all archaeological evidence, without overestimating graves and burial customs, is an essential objective of this book.

A lot of attention has been paid in the book to written sources, trying to build the interpretation of them upon archaeological evidence, logistical calculations, and topographic criteria. The result may be somewhat surprising,

especially for readers who have been accustomed to believe certain information given in the historical narratives. By the latter, I particularly mean the historical names of lands and districts, but also other toponyms. Nevertheless, my own experience in Scandinavia and Western Europe has indicated that the names and locations of the modern Baltic States are frequently messed up, let alone names of the districts in this part of the world. Why should we assume that those who wrote or told stories in Viking Age or medieval Northern Europe were much better in using place names for somewhere in the east?

In writing this book, I have been lucky to receive help from quite a number of friends and colleagues. My most sincere gratitude belongs to Gordon Snow who, with help of Mary Snow, has done the tremendous work of editing the language and re-writing my text in more fluent English. Gordon has also been my first commentator, pointed out illogical developments in my arguments and suggested additions, without ever losing the sense of humour that is so characteristic of him. Thank you, Gordon, I would never have been able to write the book in the form it is now without you!

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List of Abbreviations

AM	Estonian History Museum
LNVM	National History Museum of Latvia
SM	Saaremaa Museum
TLM	Tallinn City Museum
TLU AI	Archive of Archaeological Research Collections, Tallinn University

Viking Age Cultural Contacts across the Baltic Sea: Behind the Interpretations

It has become conventional, as a result of 20th-century political history, to consider the three Baltic States as an entirety, although the inhabitants of these countries do not normally support this view. For observers with a better knowledge of the local conditions, the Baltic States are however already polarised by their linguistic differences, apart from historical, cultural, or religious distinctions. The languages spoken in Lithuania and Latvia belong to the Baltic branch of the Indo-Germanic family of languages, which has close links to the Slavic languages. Estonian belongs, like Finnish, Livic, and several other, almost or completely dead languages, to the Finno-Ugric language-family. These so-called Baltic Finnic languages differ considerably from the tongues spoken in surrounding areas, although their vocabulary somewhat resembles, for historical reasons, the Germanic languages.

Estonia is Lutheran, as is about half of Latvia, and is in fact one of the least religious countries in the world,¹ while Lithuania, together with the other part of Latvia, is strongly Catholic. Neither Estonia nor Latvia were independent states before the 1920s, while Lithuania can pride itself on its glorious history as a major power, in the form of the medieval and post-medieval *Rzeczpospolita* (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth).

It is hardly possible to overlook the cultural significance of maritime culture, with its orientation towards overseas communication, which traditionally has characterised the Baltic Finnic-speaking population living on the coasts and islands of Estonia, and also, back in history, in much of the Latvian coastal areas (Figure 1.1.). Lithuania, on the other hand, expanded to its comparatively short sea-coast only after World War II, and is predominantly an inland country both culturally and historically. The Latvian coast, particularly that part of it which by the end of prehistory was already inhabited by ethnic Balts, is many times shorter than the Estonian.² There are no islands off the coasts of either Latvia or Lithuania, whereas islands of different sizes form nearly 10% of present-day Estonia.

¹ Altnurme 2006.

² The Estonian coastline is 3794 km, Latvian 531 km, Lithuanian 99 km (only 38 km of it facing the open sea, while the rest is sheltered by the Couronian peninsula).



FIGURE 1.1 *Historical districts in the Eastern Baltic.*

Political conditions during the 20th century are the main reason why the supposed unity of the Baltic States is also applied to the past. This unity, however, is an impression held mainly by outsiders: the Eastern Baltic archaeology itself is clearly divided on an ethnic basis into the archaeology of the Balts and that of the Baltic Finns. Closer investigation of archaeological evidence indicates at least a partial justification of such division – certain differences in archaeological material in the northern and southern half of the Eastern Baltic are

considerable. Unfortunately, the ethnic polarisation has also encouraged attitudes supported by national paradigms, which can be observed especially well in Latvian archaeology – Latvia has historically been divided between Finnic and Baltic speakers.

Archaeological research in all three Baltic States has been strongly influenced by 20th-century political events. The incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union resulted in their isolation from Western academic thought. The development of academic approaches in different Baltic States has also been affected by their earlier cultural backgrounds, as well as by their cultural and political orientation towards neighbouring states.

National identity is the main factor specifying the cultural sphere to which a country likes to see itself as belonging, in the present as well as in the past. So the Estonians, for instance, seldom wish to define themselves culturally as the neighbours of Russia, preferring to emphasise the overseas neighbourhood links with Finland or even Sweden. The culturally most important country for Lithuania is probably still Poland, together with Germany which lies in the same direction. In archaeology, Estonian scholars have more contacts with research institutions in Finland and Middle Sweden, while Latvian and Lithuanian archaeologists, when they link to Scandinavian sources, normally prefer the southern Scandinavian areas.

Distances as well as communication routes are perceived according to political reality. In the Soviet period, when Estonia was behind the Iron Curtain, people normally considered Moscow as being located comparatively close, while Helsinki, let alone Western European cities, seemed to be at an unreachable distance. The real situation is that it is about 800 km along land routes from Tallinn to Moscow, but Helsinki is situated less than 100 km away from the north Estonian coast on the other side of the Gulf of Finland. At the present time, when there are frequent transport links between Tallinn and Helsinki, people perceive these two as close neighbours. It is, however, essential to remember that contemporary logistics are, like the political situation, often projected back into history, and so prehistoric communication in several studies can only too often be assumed to be as it was when the writing was published.

The interpretation of prehistoric routes and networks is influenced by theories about how different societies could have been built up. The concept of prehistoric social systems, as it appears in Eastern Baltic archaeology and history, is primarily defined by two essential factors: the evolutionary development model, and the political situation in which these countries have found themselves in the course of previous centuries.

1.1 The Evolutionary Development Model

The interpretation of prehistoric society in what are now the Baltic States is rooted in travellers' writings of the Enlightenment period and, especially in Estonia and Latvia, in early Baltic-German studies. In the conditions of ethnic segregation (as the situation in Estonia and Latvia in the 18th and 19th centuries could be defined), scholars belonging to the Baltic-German upper class tended to depict local ethnicities as something primitive and underdeveloped. This attitude was first challenged by people coming mainly from outside the Eastern Baltic, who were influenced by Enlightenment ideas. Believing in a former "golden childhood of humankind", they constructed an earlier history of Eastern Baltic native peoples using the same naïve vision of a bygone harmonious society of heroic men and gentle women that was pervasive at that time.³

When national history writing was established in the Eastern Baltic lands towards the end of the 19th century, the latter view was accepted with surprisingly few reservations. In Estonia, however, the earlier interpretations were turned upside down – now the primitive nature of the locals was depicted as something positive, although the idea of primitivism viewed as underdevelopment compared with neighbours was not relinquished.⁴ General approaches to their prehistory took much more heroic forms in Latvia and Lithuania though, based on the vision of their glorious and warlike past. The same images were fitted into an academic frame by Eastern Baltic scholars of the 1920s and 1930s, allowing only cosmetic corrections (see Chapter 2 for more details).

The Soviet period in the Baltic States introduced the Marxist evolutionary model for the development of human society, the sociological theory of dialectical materialism developed mainly by Friedrich Engels.⁵ However, Engels' ideas were originally formulated by Lewis Henry Morgan in his book *Ancient Society*.⁶ The issues related to Marxist historical materialism, like family, class, and private property, and the past itself, were seen as an evolutionary sequence of stages, called *social formations*: primitive society, slave society, and feudal society. The first of these was classified as pre-class society and divided into successive stages of savagery and barbarism.⁷

Marxist philosophy saw the development of society as dependent on the increase of the *forces of production* – mostly all kinds of forms of technology – that led to an increase in production. The increase of production in turn caused

3 E.g. Merkel 1796; Feyerabend 1797/2004.

4 Ligi 1995.

5 1884/1958.

6 1877.

7 Engels 1884/1958; Moora 1954.

stresses in social relations, leading to unrest, which finally changed the *social formation*. These social formations always changed in the sequence shown above, indicating evolutionary succession from “lower” forms to “higher” ones.

In the West, attitudes to the Marxist theoretical framework developed gradually in the course of the 20th century, but in the territory of the former Soviet Union the basic structure of the paradigm was never changed.⁸ No theoretical thought outside its framework was allowed to be discussed or published, and the Marxist interpretation of the development of society formed a compulsory part of every field of education.⁹

Archaeology in the Baltic States, as everywhere in the former Soviet Union, was supported as an important instrument of political education and was, like other human sciences, ruled by over-politicised Marxist paradigms up to the 1990s. Although the rules of Marxist theories of the development of society were considered universal, many archaeological cultures were believed to have been in a transitional state of development. In some cultures certain “social formations” were believed to have been avoided, as, for instance, in the Eastern Baltic lands, where the formation of the pre-class society was considered to have been followed directly by feudalism.¹⁰

In Western Europe and North America, Morgan’s ideas based on Native American societies and their development, initially widely accepted, had lost a great part of their academic relevance among late-19th-century anthropologists and historians.¹¹ The majority of Morgan-Engels’ theories of the connection between social development, family, and property rights, as well as the Marxist theoretical framework in general, were never really supported in Western academic discussion throughout most of the 20th century.

The evolutionary schema of social development, however, continued its life in the minds of researchers, as well as amongst a broader audience. Morgan’s ideas were reconsidered by two neo-evolutionist anthropologists, Leslie White and Julian Steward, who envisaged four successive and evolutionary stages of social organisation: band, tribe, chiefdom, and state.¹² Rather like the assumptions of the 19th-century evolutionists the first two forms of social organisation were considered less developed “fossils”, which for one reason or another had not been able to follow “natural” technological progress.¹³

8 See also Trigger 1989: 207ff.

9 E.g. Klejn 1991; Ligi 1995.

10 Moora 1954.

11 Conn 2004.

12 Steward 1955; White 1959.

13 White 1959.

Two other American cultural anthropologists, Elman Service and Marshall Sahlins, tried to integrate White's and Steward's evolutionary models into a joint concept.¹⁴ Their ideas were soon developed by other anthropologists, notably by Morton Fried, who called the successive social and political organisations respectively: band, tribe (or rank or segmentary society), chiefdom, and state.¹⁵ Although this new scheme makes use of terms that seem at first sight to be describing different concepts, it nevertheless proceeded from the same evolutionary ideas, according to which chiefdom was a "lower" stage in social development than state, segmentary society "lower" than chiefdom, and so on. Both schemes rely on the evolutionist school of thought, according to which human society develops from a lower level to a higher one according to certain universal rules.

The assumption that some social organisations are somewhat "higher" than others, which in its essence is clearly prejudiced, should be considered outdated in modern academic discussion, but still lives a life of its own especially in archaeological studies, where it is often convenient to conceptualise prehistoric society according to some schema. Even some introductory textbooks for cultural anthropology still use the division into the successive typology of *band to tribe to chiefdom to early state*, when describing the political organisation of non-Western societies.¹⁶ Others prefer to define societies according to kinship relations, or, for instance, the phenomenology of power or religion, the economic base, gender roles, and other social aspects, while considering the schema of successive stages to be a neo-evolutionary absurdity.¹⁷ More than before, attention has been paid to the internal dynamics of prehistoric societies.¹⁸

There is not just one linear evolutionary pathway that all societies follow; rather societies develop in various different ways. Recent archaeological research has, therefore, started to stress the variety of forms that early non-egalitarian societies may take. Alison Rautman has stressed that it is misguided to look for an either/or answer – a choice between hierarchical and egalitarian – or even to attempt to position a society between these two extremes. In contrast to the more traditional, "vertical" dimension, such an attitude has been called a "horizontal" variation. Horizontal characteristics are, for instance, the degree to which leadership was "individualising", as opposed to "group oriented". Such approaches avoid implications of inferiority involved

14 Sahlins & Service 1960; Service 1962; 1971.

15 1967.

16 E.g. Kottak 1995; Haviland 2000.

17 E.g. Cheater 1989; Lewis 1990; Drennan *et al.* 2010.

18 Price & Feinman 2010.

in ranking societies with a corporate mode of organisation “lower” than some others on a scale of hierarchy or complexity.¹⁹

In the Baltic States, as well as several other countries in the eastern part of Europe, the earlier Morgan-based model was not replaced by that of Service-*et-al* until the 1990s, after the fall of the Iron Curtain. In the Eastern Baltic archaeologies, particularly in Estonia and Latvia, this meant that the earlier Marxist social model could be exchanged for the new, Service-*et-al*-system, without substantial collisions. The pre-state stages of social development were now simply categorised as band, tribe, and chiefdom.²⁰ The stages, as well as their typical traits in the societies under consideration, were however organised the same way as before, i.e. according to a certain hierarchy. This made it inevitable that certain societies were defined as “more highly developed” than others. This phenomenon demonstrated a desire, perhaps human but in any case academically incorrect, to show the development of prehistoric society in the researcher’s own country as no less sophisticated than among neighbours.

According to the evolutionist viewpoint, a social order with more egalitarian social relations will precede a more hierarchical one. Iron Age Estonia and Finland, which have been defined as societies with more egalitarian social relations by almost all earlier scholars, should thus have shown a retarded social development in comparison with their neighbours. According to that line of thinking, if conquest and Christianisation from abroad had not taken place, these societies would have eventually shown, by virtue of intra-societal resources alone, a more developed hierarchy and thereafter, apparently, even the evolution of statehood. However, it seems that the egalitarian or, more precisely, the more collective social model, has been more deeply implanted in some areas than others, and its inevitable transition into a strongly hierarchical society even without foreign impulses is far from certain.

What is more, the term “egalitarian society” is somewhat inaccurate, as it develops a false impression of general equality. Certain power relations exist in all societies, and their presence in Late Iron Age Estonia and Finland is beyond doubt. Thus, the problem can be reduced to the modelling of how power relations were organized and how great a proportion of society had access to power. Throughout the Middle Ages, the territory of present-day Estonia and Latvia remained politically fragmented, and so the situation already typical of the prehistoric periods persisted. Alongside different *seigniors* with different levels of influence, a strong vassalage existed, and the influence of the latter on political decision-making varied greatly from region to region. In a large part of the territories under consideration the influence of vassals on

19 Drennan *et al.* 2010.

20 Ligi 1995; Šnē 2002.

decision-making can be considered greater than it was in contemporary Scandinavia, let alone most countries in Western Europe.²¹ It goes without saying that the political authority of the members of the vassalage also varied, and families that were more influential could be clearly distinguished. However, corporate traits were obvious in the distribution of power, and the society as a whole could be defined as more egalitarian than in most of Europe. The continuation of a tradition going back to the prehistoric period can easily be seen.

The hierarchical social structure with more egalitarian or collectivist traits during the medieval period has usually been regarded as a cultural peculiarity, rather than evolutionary backwardness.²² Recognition of similar power structures in Estonia and Latvia has been hindered by the ethnic conflict caused by the German and Danish conquest in the 13th century, which developed into national segregation during the later centuries. This later situation has often been projected back into the Baltic Middle Ages (the 12th/13th–16th centuries) by historians who suppose a highly hierarchical social organisation simply on the basis of (assumed) ethnic origin.²³ Recently, however, the assumption of ethnic segregation in such early times has been challenged.²⁴

Evolutionist prejudices about social order should also be avoided when dealing with pre-state structures. A society that appears more egalitarian in social relations does not necessarily need to be at a lower level of development. It would rather be appropriate to speak of cultural singularity, which would also appear in other aspects of society, e.g. means of subsistence, gender relations, mythological world view, or material culture. The natural environment in and around the area, the size of population, or the political situation in the region are undoubtedly responsible for the persistence of such social order. The existence of a society with a hierarchical social order in the vicinity definitely influences the situation in a society with more corporate power relations, and *vice versa*.

1.2 Eastern Baltic Archaeology and Concepts of Different Cultural Impacts

An analysis of the studies of Viking Age and early medieval contacts in the Eastern Baltic reveals a clear correlation with the contemporary political

21 Raudkivi 2007.

22 Compare e.g. medieval social systems on Iceland or Gotland, Yrwing 1978; Sawyer 1982: 56–59.

23 Moora & Ligi 1970; Raudkivi 2007: 19ff; Selart 2012.

24 Mägi 2003; Raudkivi 2011.

situation and researchers' personal background. What is more: although political reality and cultural attitudes might have changed several times in the flux of the history of archaeological thought, it is often easy to see the impact of earlier attitudes even in later publications. Several ideas about overseas interaction in the Baltic during the Viking Age and later periods demonstrate a direct link back to the earlier studies.

Evolutionary approaches that are frequently deeply hidden in scholars' minds nevertheless define their attitudes when they view some early societies or even ethnic groups as "more highly developed" compared to some others. These attitudes influence the way they visualise communication in earlier ages. The interpretation of late prehistoric and medieval social systems is therefore of crucial importance when discussing the character of interaction between societies.

1.2.1 *Germanic "Culture Carriers" and the Gothic Theory*

In Estonia and Latvia, the essence of 19th-century archaeology was mostly determined by Baltic Germans, who operated in local cultural circumstances that at best can be described as ethnic segregation. All ethnic Latvians and Estonians (as well as the Lithuanian peasants) formed the lower social class in the 19th-century Eastern Baltic, and this situation was then used when interpreting prehistory. The local population, especially in Estonia and Latvia, was believed to have remained at the level of some "lower" stage of social development until comparatively recently, and several Baltic German scholars simply did not believe that these nations ever could or even theoretically might have been on the same level as Germanic tribes. It goes without saying that the latter were, at the same time, depicted as the carriers of earlier civilisation in Northern Europe.

In accordance with the academic approaches of their time, the Baltic German historians and archaeologists followed the framework of the ethnic paradigm formulated by the German scholar Gustaf Kossinna. Following *De origine actibusque Getarum* ("The Origins and Deeds of the Goths"), written by Jordanes in the 6th century, they proposed a so-called Gothic theory for the Eastern Baltic. According to this, the original population of the Eastern Baltic lived more or less at the Stone Age level until the middle of the first millennium AD, when these areas were taken over by the Goths. Estonian and Latvian archaeological sites and artefacts from before this time were then ascribed to the Goths. It was naturally assumed – since their character did not differ so remarkably from corresponding material in, for instance, Scandinavia – that they could not belong to some postulated Stone Age people on the "lower" level of social development. The Baltic Finns in particular – the Estonians and Livs – were believed by some scholars to have remained at the Stone Age level even

in the 13th century.²⁵ This probably derives from the widespread confidence in written sources that characterised earlier historical and archaeological studies. In these, Baltic Finns were often connected with primitive *finnas* described by Tacitus. Sources for such hypothesis lie, however, in general conditions of the period when they were formulated, and correlate well with the then current scientific understanding of the prehistory of Northern Europe.

The Goths were believed to have stopped in the Baltic countries during their peregrinations, which then meant that the larger share of archaeological monuments of the area could be interpreted as their legacy. For instance some stone graves in Estonia and Latvia, the so-called *tarand*-graves from the first half of the 1st millennium AD, were arbitrarily interpreted as “ship settings”, a grave type known in Scandinavia, and accordingly ascribed to Scandinavians,²⁶ or to the Goths.²⁷ The theories thus relied upon the “culture carrier” (*Kultur-träger*) concept, according to which archaeological sites could only be created by Germanic peoples, Goths or Vikings, but never by local “primitive” inhabitants. Several archaeologists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries also suggested that the ancestors of present Estonians and Latvians only arrived in their present area of habitation after the Goths had left, that is, in the 6th–7th centuries AD.²⁸

The Gothic theory remained the cornerstone of Estonian and Latvian archaeology during the whole Baltic German period, in the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. It continued to be partly supported by the first native archaeologists, although they tended to speak about Gothic influences on local people, who were now believed to have lived in the territory of present-day Estonia and Latvia from a much earlier time.²⁹ The Gothic theory was not finally abandoned until the 1950s. Its end can be linked to the change of the ethnic paradigm in Polish archaeology: the inhabitants of the Vistula River estuary area, which early 20th-century Estonian and Latvian archaeologists had seen as the base for the Gothic impact on the Eastern Baltic, were now believed to have already been Slavic as early as the first half of the 1st millennium AD. More precisely, this paradigm change was caused by the Soviet

25 Grewingk 1865: 109; 1884: 91ff.

26 Sievers 1877.

27 Grewingk 1884.

28 Hausmann 1910.

29 Tallgren 1922: 79; Schmiedehelm 1923, 1931; Moora 1926b: 200; Vassar 1943: 42; see also Šnē 1999; Rādiņš 2007.

occupation of the Eastern Baltic, which introduced exaggerated Slavic influences into the interpretation of history.³⁰

If we compare the development of the Gothic and in a broader sense *Kulturträger* theory in Estonia and Latvia with somewhat similar ideas in Finland, the political “tacking threads” behind the interpretations of prehistoric phenomena become even more obvious. The 19th-century political situation in Finland was somewhat different from that in the region of the present-day Baltic States. Although all these areas belonged to the Russian Empire, Finland definitely had more political autonomy, and the ethnic situation there favoured local Finns much more than was the case for the inhabitants of the Eastern Baltic countries, given the Baltic Germans’ derogatory attitude towards the original peoples.

In accord with the political and cultural circumstances, the role that the Finns played in their country’s prehistory was much more emphasised. Although Gothic, and especially Scandinavian influence was always accepted, several researchers put forward sceptical suggestions about the mainstream theory as early as the late 19th century. Väinö Wallin (Voionmaa), for instance, pointed out that artefacts similar to those found in Scandinavia could have easily been used by local Finns.³¹ Alfred Hackman suggested that the ancestors of both Finns and Estonians already lived in their present area of habitation at the turn of our era, and were only influenced by the Goths, from whom they took over the “higher” features of their culture – a theory similar to those put forward by Estonian archaeologists in the 1920s and 1930s.³²

The development of archaeological thought in Lithuania up to World War I differed from that in Estonia, Latvia, and Finland in many essential aspects. Research traditions in Lithuania were predominantly influenced by the history of the country, especially the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth *Rzeczpospolita*. The state, however, collapsed in 1795, resulting in large areas of it being gradually incorporated into the Russian Empire. As early as the 16th century, local archaeological sites in present-day Lithuania were considered symbols of former glory, and these tendencies were only deepened by Lithuanian and Polish native historians of the 19th century.

The failure of uprisings in 1861 and 1863 against the Russian regime led to the empire brutally suppressing national sentiment in Lithuania and Poland, which merely encouraged the trend to use prehistory and, in Lithuania,

30 Vasks 1999; Tvauri 2003.

31 1894: 34.

32 Hackman 1905; Tvauri 2003.

especially the period of the Grand Duchy, to build up national identity.³³ Ideas of German “culture carriers” never played a particular role in the interpretations of Lithuanian prehistory, and the theories of Gothic peregrinations had relevance only for coastal areas in present-day northern Poland and the former East Prussia.

1.2.2 *Discussing Ethnicities within the Eastern Baltic*

Young national states like Latvia and Estonia used prehistory largely as a means for justifying their existence as states in their relations with other peoples and countries around them. The ambition to consolidate the inhabitants of a country as one nation cannot be underestimated in these processes. These attitudes are particularly relevant for Latvia, where Finnic-speaking ethnic groups, Livs, still existed among the Baltic population in the early 20th century, and where they had played a role in the early history of the country that could not be overlooked. As a result, one of the most substantial questions in Latvian archaeology more or less since its beginning turned out to be that of the Baltic tribes in prehistory. Because of its different historical background, ethnicity never played the same role in Lithuanian studies of early history, while in Estonian national archaeology it only appeared in the form of discussing cultural influences from outside.

Ethnic attitudes in Latvian archaeological research can first and foremost be seen in efforts to locate separate tribal groups, associating them with particular archaeological sites.³⁴ However, starting from the 1930s, the origin of the Latvian people was directly united with ethnic Balts or Indo-Europeans, while Finno-Ugrians were largely ignored.³⁵ In his book on Latvian prehistory, prominent Latvian archaeologist Francis Balodis considered Baltic Finnic ethnic groups on the territory of present-day Latvia as clearly less developed, while all technological as well as cultural achievement was assumed to have been introduced by the ethnic Balts.³⁶ Andris Šnē has seen these tendencies as an attempt to carry on the ideas of the *Kulturträger* mission, only this time replacing the Germans with the Balts.³⁷

The approach of strictly separating ethnic Baltic and Baltic Finnic cultures has characterised not only Latvian but also Estonian archaeology and early history studies throughout most of the period that nation-based research schools

33 Jarockis 2004.

34 Vasks 1999.

35 Šnē 1999.

36 1938.

37 Šnē 1999.

have existed. During the last decades, since the time of independent states, when the possibilities for international academic research opened up again, some scholars in Latvia have put forward new theories suggesting that the role of the Baltic Finns in the country's cultural development was even less relevant than previously believed.³⁸ Others, on the other hand, argue for the substantial and comparable role which all local ethnic groups played in the genesis of the Latvian nation.³⁹ A new tendency is to treat as one all the different ethnic groups that once lived on the territory of present-day Latvia, simply ignoring the cultural differences indicated by archaeological evidence in different regions.⁴⁰ This attempt to project contemporary national unity back into prehistory frequently acts as covert support for the ethnic Balts, who form the basis for the national identity of present-day Latvia.

Latvian archaeology (as well as national feelings in general) has always been connected predominantly with those in Lithuania, first of all because of similar languages, but also because of historical links – most of the eastern part of Latvia belonged politically to the Polish-Lithuanian state in the 16th–18th centuries. These facts have reinforced traditional Latvian contacts with countries further south and south-west.⁴¹

1.2.3 *Eastern Influences – The Russian Question*

The emphasis on Germanic influences in Estonian and Latvian prehistory served until the 20th century to justify the privileged position of the German minority in the Baltic. As a kind of counteraction to these attitudes, some Russian researchers began as early as the 19th century to underline the role of Russians in the early history of this region, thus replacing the German *Kulturträger* concept with that of the Slavic analogue. It goes without saying that underlying these attitudes was the political demand to provide a “historical” basis for the incorporation of these areas into the Russian Empire. In addition, several late-19th-century Latvian and Estonian intellectuals placed great emphasis on the supposedly friendly relationship between the local nations and Russians in the struggle against German crusaders in the 13th century – an ideological interpretation that could be explained by the tendency in the 19th century to look towards Russia as an ally against the local Germans and their

38 For the Finnic population in Couronia see e.g. Asaris 1996 and for those in the lower reaches of the Daugava River Grāvere 1994; Spirģis 2008.

39 Šnē 1999, 2002.

40 Graudonis 2001; Šnē 2002.

41 Radiņš 2007.

cultural and political power.⁴² Still, these attitudes were not widespread, and up to the middle of the 20th century the eastern influences in general remained less emphasised factors in the analysis of influences on Eastern Baltic cultures.

Interpretation of eastern influences on the late prehistoric Eastern Baltic areas changed dramatically owing to World War II and the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union. During the Soviet period, connections with the Slavs in the east became a compulsory part of archaeology in these areas.⁴³ When in Soviet archaeology ideas about diffusionism were replaced by the concept of migrations, strenuous efforts were made, especially in the late 1940s and 1950s, to interpret some archaeological sites in present Estonia and Latvia as proof of a Slavonic population there as early as the 5th–6th centuries.⁴⁴ Slavic influence was seen in all possible aspects of the prehistoric archaeological evidence, and evaluated as entirely positive. Politically dictated Marxist theories, combined with Great Russian chauvinism, had an oppressive effect on local archaeologies in the Baltic States, which were then republics of the Soviet Union, quite naturally causing repugnance towards these ideas among local researchers.

One of the consequences of these exaggerated interpretations of late prehistoric Slavic connections has been the tendency to ignore any more far-reaching connections between local societies and Kiev-Rus, or Slavs in general, and this characterised academic discussion immediately after the independence of the Baltic States was re-established. A good example is provided by the publications of Estonian archaeologist Priit Ligi, who in the early 1990s put forward a hypothesis of language replacement for the Finno-Ugric peoples in present-day north-west Russia, and their consequent integration with Kiev-Rus.⁴⁵ Demonstrating that there is actually no concrete archaeological evidence, he disputed the mainstream view in Russian archaeology that the infiltration of Slavic tribes into north-west Russia had started as early as the 6th century and their expansion to the Finnish Gulf littorals in the 11th–12th centuries.⁴⁶ Ligi's theories caused an extensive and in many cases politicised debate in Russia,⁴⁷ but were also received extremely negatively in Estonia,⁴⁸ where several

42 Šnē 1999.

43 Ligi 1995: 187–189; Vasks 1999; Mägi 2002: 8–14; Lang 2006: 13–40.

44 Ligi 1993b.

45 Ligi 1993b, 1994a.

46 For the Russian viewpoint see Sedov 1987, 1995.

47 Ligi 1993b, 1994a and the counterarguments.

48 Ligi 1993a, 1994b, 1994c; Selirand 1994; Tõnisson 1994.

counterarguments seem to have been driven only by nationalistic feelings and unwillingness to have anything in common with the Russians ethnically.

Another aspect relevant for Finnish and Estonian archaeology is the traditional links seen between Baltic Finns and eastern Finno-Ugrians, an ideology based mainly on linguistic assessments, but also widely used in prehistory studies. Research in Finno-Ugric areas in present-day Russia, initiated by Finnish archaeologists, began as early as the 1840s, and was pursued until the mid-1930s when the Soviet regime closed Western connections.⁴⁹ During the decades after World War II Estonia took over the most prominent role in the eastern initiatives. Connections with eastern Finno-Ugrians, including those in archaeology, have been kept up until the present day.

1.2.4 *Ideas of Scandinavian Impact*

The national movements at the end of the 19th century began the process of linking antiquities and local peoples everywhere in the Eastern Baltic. The influence of strong Germanic ideas did not however disappear from Estonian, Latvian, and Finnish archaeology (see Section 1.2.1.). Again, the development was different in Lithuania, where during the period prior to World War II the focus of attention in archaeological studies was predominantly on the Grand Duchy, and thus on southern and south-western rather than Scandinavian connections.⁵⁰ The Lithuanian archaeological material indeed demonstrates cultural traits clearly different from Scandinavian ones, with the exception of Couronia, which did not belong to Lithuania before the 1940s.

In Estonian archaeology, the flurry of cultural-historic theories resulted in the replacement of the concept of Germanic relations and (partly) Gothic theory with that of a strong Scandinavian influence on prehistoric Estonia. It has been a long lasting idea in Estonian archaeology that Scandinavian influence was extraordinarily strong in the Bronze Age, especially during the period 1000–500 BC. Later on the connections were assumed to continue, more or less intensively, throughout all prehistoric periods, and to reach their second culmination in the second half of the Viking Age. After the 11th century, Scandinavian influence on local culture was deemed to have diminished considerably, and beginning with the 13th century to have been replaced by direct influence from present-day Germany.

Around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries Latvian archaeologists also started to pay more attention to Scandinavian contacts in prehistory.⁵¹

49 Salminen 2003.

50 Jarockis 2004.

51 Buza *et al.* 1997.

However, in Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s, the focus was not so much on the role of Scandinavian connections in the formation of local prehistoric culture, but rather on the influences from the south, including Germany.⁵² This clear difference in concepts about cultural relations, now also appearing between Estonia and Latvia, was probably consolidated by the markedly stronger influences of Finnish archaeology in Estonia, based on their common Finno-Ugric background.⁵³

The interpretations of the prehistoric period in Finland have for a long time derived from the idea that the coastal areas of Finland have experienced strong Scandinavian influence for most of the period, so that these areas were seen as peripheries of the Scandinavian cultural sphere. The fact that Finland belonged to the Swedish state for a long time, and that the Swedish-speaking minority still has a rather prominent role in the Finnish state and culture, will have influenced these interpretations. The national movement of Finland, on the other hand, has stressed the importance of Finns during the prehistoric period. In his book, Finnish historian Derek Fewster has described in detail the spreading of anti-Swedish sentiments and the influence of these on the interpretations of the prehistoric period, particularly after Finland was incorporated into the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 19th century.⁵⁴

During the 1920s and 1930s, the idea that influences from Scandinavia were central to the formation of local cultures prevailed both in Finnish and Estonian archaeology; these were successfully combined with nationalist views of the prehistoric period.⁵⁵ The situation in these countries altered in the 1940s, when Estonia, as well as the other Baltic States, was occupied by the Soviet Union.

During the period of Marxist paradigms, when the Slavic impact was exaggerated, the study of contacts with Scandinavia in the Eastern Baltic archaeological material turned into a form of passive resistance. According to the positivist paradigm dominant in archaeology at that time, such “contacts” were mostly reduced to parallels that could be found in the finds collected, and in similar grave types that could be identified in both territories.⁵⁶ Contemporary Finnish archaeology, in contrast, could operate within an independent

52 Vasks 1999.

53 For connections between Finnish and Latvian archaeologies during the interwar period, see Buza *et al.* 1997.

54 Fewster 2006.

55 Kokkonen 1993; Ligi 1995; Salminen 1996; Vasks 1999; Fewster 2006; Immonen & Taavitsainen 2011.

56 Ligi 1995.

state and the diminishing importance of Scandinavian influences when interpreting prehistoric society was characteristic of it. Although the coastal areas especially were still considered part of the Scandinavian cultural sphere, a Scandinavian population was no longer assumed to have directly lived in these areas. Even in the territories where the archaeological material appeared very similar to that of Sweden, the preference was to speak of a mixed Scandinavian-Finnish population.⁵⁷

In the Baltic States, a renewed emphasis on Scandinavian influences in interpreting prehistoric societies appeared in the 1990s, following the restoration of the independence of these states.⁵⁸ This orientation was obviously connected to the political and cultural affiliation of the Baltic countries with the West, especially the Nordic countries.⁵⁹

As for Russian archaeology, there has been a tradition, during the last 40 years to consider Scandinavian influence as an indication of a somewhat “higher” culture.⁶⁰ Throughout the whole Soviet period, researchers focused mainly on early contacts between Scandinavia and Russia, leaving the Eastern Baltic effectively outside the international discussion. However, the recent trend in north-west Russian archaeology, very likely again for political reasons, is to point out that the quantity of Scandinavian material finds in these areas was clearly overestimated in earlier research.⁶¹

1.3 The Character of Communication across the Baltic Sea

The number of publications discussing Viking Age communication across the Baltic Sea is considerable; however, the vast majority have as their main focus the relationship between Scandinavia and the early *Rus'* state.⁶² Several more

57 Salo 1970: 140ff.

58 Lang 1995, 1996; Ligi 1995; Šnē 1999b; Žulkus 2000; Bitner-Wroblewska 2001: 121–127; Mägi 2002; A. Zariņa 2006; Spirģis 2008.

59 Andersson *et al.* 1997.

60 For the development of these ideas see Jansson 1997: 25 and references; Nosov *et al.* 2005: 18 and references.

61 Rybina & Khvoshchinskaya 2010.

62 In this book, the term *Rus'* is used for the in many aspects obscure political formation mainly in the territory of present-day north-west Russia before approximately 1000 AD, as well as for the group of people who actively participated in this formation. Kiev-Rus is used for Russian princedoms in the 10th–11th centuries.

general approaches, for instance on trade between medieval Europe and the Arabic world, may also be relevant here.⁶³

1.3.1 *Viking Age Trade in Northern Europe*

The Belgian historian Henri Pirenne analysed, mainly in the 1920s, how the Arabs' conquests disrupted Mediterranean trade, and thus affected the rise of the Carolingians and the Frankish Empire. His interpretation relied greatly on economic history; for instance, he paid a great deal of attention to the ways in which the Arab conquest in the western Mediterranean influenced the rise of a monetary economy in the Carolingian Empire. He argued that in the 9th century long-distance trade was minimal; the Carolingian economy was a closed agrarian-based economy without towns, merchants, or trade. The period from the 10th to the 12th centuries was, according to Pirenne, the time when sea routes from Europe to the Muslim world opened up and long-distance trade revived again, which led to the emergence of trade centres – medieval cities – in Europe.⁶⁴

Although Pirenne's theories almost ignored the North-European reality, he had a direct impact on studies conducted by Swedish scholar Sture Bolin about a decade later. Bolin discussed the significance of the hoards of 9th–10th-century Islamic coins found in abundance in Russia, Poland, the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, and Scandinavia, that is, beyond the northern border of the Carolingian Empire. He emphasised the role the Vikings might have played in the transfer of Arabic silver to medieval Europe, where it was re-melted.⁶⁵

In the decades after World War II the Hungarian-American historian Karl Polanyi set out new views of economic history.⁶⁶ He discussed the character of the economy in the pre-industrial and industrial worlds, assuming that the market economy did not play a dominating role in early societies, which were more likely characterised by relationships involving the exchange of gifts and redistribution. His anthropological approach to economics quickly became popular among other disciplines, including archaeology, where Polanyi's works are frequently referred to even today.

The anthropological approaches as applied in the 1960s and 1970s perceived links between gift-making economies and chiefdoms, as they were described by Elman Service and others, and were developed by several archaeologists,

63 For an overview of these theories see Blomkvist 2009b.

64 Pirenne 1925/1974; 1939.

65 Bolin 1939.

66 1944; 1968.

the most well-known of them probably the American economic anthropologist Timothy Earle (see Section 1.1.).⁶⁷

A more recent approach to the economic history of early medieval Europe was presented in the 1980s, when British archaeologist Richard Hodges published his book about Dark Age economics.⁶⁸ Using archaeological evidence, which he preferred to historical sources, he tried to explain the early medieval economic growth in Europe and its political effects in terms of the models of economic anthropology. In accordance with the popular ideas of this time, Hodges linked the emergence of undefended *emporia* along the long-distance trade routes with gift and commodity exchange during the 7th to 10th centuries, or more generally, with the “prestige culture” of Germanic society in northern Europe. In his anthropological approaches, Hodges relied greatly on scholars like Marshall Sahlins, Karl Polanyi, and George Dalton.⁶⁹

Hodges paid a lot of attention to the 9th century, when crucial changes took place in European economics. Charlemagne, the great Frankish ruler at the beginning of this period, tried to stimulate a market-based economy, developing the pre-existing system of peripheral markets. It was also the time when Arabic silver started to flow into the Carolingian Empire across the Baltic Sea, and was re-melted in large quantities to contribute to the monetary system supported by Charlemagne. The expansion of long-distance trade in Northern Europe could not, according to Hodges, be explained entirely by increased demand for quality furs or other commodities from the North – the access to these luxuries was probably restricted to a small elite. More likely, it was the recently opened silver routes themselves from the Orient through Russian river-systems and the Baltic Sea to Western Europe that attracted the Carolingians.⁷⁰

The heyday of the Carolingian Empire was, however, soon over. The death of Charlemagne in 814 was followed by social and political instabilities, causing an economic depression. Plundering raids conducted by the Vikings only deepened the economic crises that characterised most of the 9th century.⁷¹ The middle of this century saw the decline of trade centres along the coasts of the North Sea, while *emporia* around the Baltic Sea expanded.⁷²

67 E.g. 1997.

68 1989.

69 Hodges 1989: 14.

70 Hodges 1989: 104–129.

71 Hodges 1989: 151–157.

72 Hodges 1989: 47–65.

The most generalising overview of Viking Age towns in Northern Europe has been presented by Helen Clarke and Björn Ambrosiani.⁷³ They treated the emergence of trade centres and later medieval towns as a phenomenon associated especially with long-distance trade, but without closer discussion of why trade expanded precisely at the beginning of the Viking Age. The book also discussed trade centres east of the Baltic Sea, but in quite a superficial way. This can however be explained by its publication date in the early 1990s, when knowledge of Russian or particularly Eastern Baltic archaeology was still comparatively limited in the West.

In Eastern Europe, Russian archaeologist Gleb Lebedev had come out as early as 1985 with his pioneering book about *Rus'* and Vikings in Northern Europe.⁷⁴ He defined the meaning, origin, and function of *vic*, that is *emporium*, an approach that has been used as a cornerstone for Iron Age settlement archaeology in several Eastern European countries since. For Lebedev, the driving force that attracted the Varangians to *Rus'* was trade. Unfortunately the Eastern Baltic and especially the northern half of it seem to be simply a blank spot on the map for him, bypassed by all international trade routes. Lebedev's discussion of the relationship between Scandinavia and *Rus'* has nevertheless served until now as the most thorough, and wider awareness of it is obviously hindered only by the fact that the book was published in Russian.

One of the most comprehensive overviews of Scandinavian culture in present-day Russia and Ukraine, published in English, is the book by Wladyslaw Duczko.⁷⁵ He, too, saw trade as the driving force behind the colonisation of these areas during the 9th and 10th centuries, and linked the decline of Scandinavian culture in these areas with the end of the influx of new Scandinavian groups. The book paid very little, if any, attention to ethnicities other than Slavs in the territory of *Rus'*, much less the Eastern Baltic or Finnish populations between the Slavs and the Scandinavians.

A book by Gunilla Larsson gives a very detailed overview of Viking Age trade routes in present-day Russia, seen through the lens of ship-building technology, but compiled with other archaeological and written evidence.⁷⁶ Her point of view, however, presupposed that the *Rus'* were entirely Scandinavian, while the Slavs themselves were considered completely passive. Not only did she attribute all international artefact types found in present-day Russia to the Scandinavians, but she even used evidence like unexcavated mounds similar

73 1993.

74 1985; new, supplemented edition posthumously in 2005.

75 2004.

76 2007.

to central Swedish ones, or all boat rivets found in different countries to support her thesis. Numerous finds of boat rivets in Estonia and Finland, although normally occurring in very local circumstances, were accordingly considered as belonging to one-time Scandinavian populations in these areas.⁷⁷

1.3.2 *Trade or War? The Character of Viking Age Overseas Interaction*

It has been a long-lasting tradition to depict the Vikings as barbarians, compared with the Arabs or the Carolingian Empire, and to see their plundering raids as the main reason for the collapse of the Frankish state. Some scholars have also argued against the Vikings being traders, and suggested that hoards of oriental silver in Scandinavia could be seen as a result of plundering raids in *Rus'*. This idea was put forward by the Swiss historian F.-J. Himmly in the 1950s,⁷⁸ and developed by the Anglo-Scandinavian historian Peter Sawyer in the 1980s.⁷⁹ In particular, he questioned the function of Birka, which traditionally has been seen as a centre for eastern trade. "It is ... difficult to understand what Birka merchants had to offer in eastern markets that could not be better obtained in Russia", he wrote.⁸⁰ Similar arguments were used about the position of Gotland: it is likely that commodities from Russian areas were collected in both Gotland and Birka, and sent further on to Western Europe, but it still remains unclear what these Scandinavian areas could offer for trade with *Rus'*. Imports unearthed both in Birka and on Gotland are predominantly eastern, while the quantity of Western European imports seems to be considerably more modest.

Sawyer argued that trade with Russia only got the wind in its sails in Scandinavia in the 11th century, when trade with Western Europe also expanded. He pointed out that there were actually only a few written sources referring to eastern trade before this century, and the fact that very few distinctive 9th–10th-century Gotlandic women's ornaments have been found in present-day Russia could be seen as a serious objection to the theory that the prosperity of the island was based on trade with Russia at that time. According to Sawyer, the abundance of 9th–10th-century Kufic coins found in Scandinavia can primarily be explained by plundering raids in *Rus'*, a kind of parallel to the Viking raids in Western Europe. These eastern raids stopped in the late 10th century owing to the consolidation of power in Russia. Birka can be seen as a centre for these invasions. Sawyer's theories about the essence of Viking Age

77 Larsson 2007: 195–238 especially.

78 For his theories, see Blomkvist 2009b: 159 and references.

79 1985.

80 Sawyer 1985: 166.

communication across the Baltic Sea has often been mentioned in later research but never broadly accepted.

One of the more recent studies of Viking Age Baltic Sea trade has been published by Ingrid Gustin.⁸¹ She claimed to be interested in the character of trade, or interaction in general, rather than commodities or trade routes. The question of Gotland's role in Viking Age interaction drew her special interest. Gustin relied on material culture, selecting two artefact types for close analysis: weights and penannular brooches, more precisely those with faceted terminals. Comparing certain kinds of weights with the brooches with faceted terminals, she argued that such penannular brooches could function as a kind of token demonstrating unity especially in trade communication, thus helping to guarantee safety along trade routes.⁸²

Probably the most innovative of recent studies on Viking Age long-distance trade has been written by Danish archaeologist Søren Sindbæk; however, in its complete form his research has so far been published only in Danish.⁸³ Sindbæk focused on trade routes and nodal points, analysing their appearance, movements, and development. A great deal of his attention was devoted to the eastern connections, where, among other aspects, he introduced the concept of seasonal trade in the northern zone, where winter routes might have played an essential role. With this, he further developed the study by Russian archaeologist A. Miklyayev, who, in turn, has published mainly in Russian.⁸⁴ Sindbæk offered a possible answer to Sawyer's question about western commodities that might have attracted the *Rus'* – iron was produced in Scandinavia in much larger quantities and of better quality than in the east, and could easily have been traded against furs and oriental silver.⁸⁵

1.3.3 *Ethnic Factors in East-West Overseas Interaction*

Although scholars discussing Scandinavian expansion into present-day Russia never entirely overlook the ethnic factors in these processes, the problem is nearly always reduced to a question about the relationship between the Scandinavians and the Slavs. Large areas once inhabited by Finnic- and Baltic-speaking peoples in the northern half of the European part of present-day Russia are normally mentioned in all writings, but still without interest or any wish to examine their existence more closely, or to look at how linguistic

81 2004.

82 Gustin 2004: 220–234.

83 2005.

84 Miklyayev 1992.

85 Sindbaek 2005: 210–233.

and cultural unity might have influenced communication over long distances. Interpretations have been based on the hard and fast political and ethnic demarcation lines of the present day rather than the fluid situation of the earlier times.

In the Viking Age as well as in the centuries preceding it, however, the situation probably differed markedly from that in the later periods. The early *Rus'* state was politically a most unstable construction, and the north-western areas of Russia could ethnically and culturally rather be considered together with the present-day Eastern Baltic, instead of with the areas of Slavic habitation further south.

From the standpoint of the Baltic States and Finland, it is relevant to refer to Swedish archaeologist Johan Callmer's writings on the early stages of *Rus'*, that is, during the period 500–900 AD.⁸⁶ Callmer, who expressed a special interest in the ethnic situation in northern Europe at this time, discussed the topics of migration, assimilation, and acculturation. He argued against the Scandinavian archaeologists Ture Arne⁸⁷ and Holger Arbman,⁸⁸ who had suggested that the Scandinavian colonisation in certain parts of present-day Russia, primarily in the south-eastern Ladoga region, was predominantly an agrarian colonisation, although initially driven by trade. Callmer found no archaeological evidence for this assumption and suggested instead that these were initially some few Scandinavian hunters and traders, who in the pre-Viking and early Viking period were pioneers in colonising the Eastern European areas.⁸⁹

Callmer surmised that a leading role in Scandinavians' eastern expansion was played by the mixed Scandinavian-Finnic population that inhabited the Finnish and Estonian coastal areas, and particularly the Åland archipelago, centuries before the Viking Age. This population displayed a Scandinavian cultural identity and attitudes, but ethnically consisted of different components. The evolving *Rus'* identity was already bilingual from its beginning. Skills in speaking Baltic Finnic languages helped to create contacts with Finno-Ugric-speaking peoples, and thus contributed considerably to the process of extending the communication network eastwards.

Callmer also took into consideration problems connected with the Slavic expansion towards the north and west of present-day Russia, that is, questions which have traditionally been very closely linked with political preferences. He supported the ideas presented by e.g. Gleb Lebedev, Elena Melnikova, and

86 2000.

87 1914.

88 1955.

89 Callmer 2000.

Vladimir Petrukhin, that the numbers of the Slavic aristocracy, and indeed of the common Slavic population, would have been negligible in north-west Russia and in certain areas along the Volga route until the end of the 9th century. The Eastern Slavs, Callmer concluded, became the central contributors to the later development of Russian princedoms, but they were not part of the initial stage of the *Rus'* state, where the dominant role was played by local Baltic Finnic- and Baltic-speaking peoples.⁹⁰

A somewhat similar theory had already been put forward in 1993 by Estonian archaeologist Priit Ligi (see also Section 1.2.3.).⁹¹ He argued that 6th- to 10th-century archaeological finds in present-day north-west Russia indicated consistency within the evidence, while several “Slavic” features in it seemed more likely to be the result of thinking constrained by present-day political pressures. Slavic colonisation in these areas was very modest, he believed, until the 11th century, and consisted only of members of the higher social strata in the early centres of *Rus'*. Large-scale Slavic immigration never took place in these areas, but the local Baltic Finnic population accepted Russian as a common language, and integrated into the Russian state in the course of the following centuries. Ligi's theories were however immediately associated with politics, called “national extremism” and “political incorrectness”.⁹²

Several other archaeologists have also emphasised in their writings that the Viking Age eastern trade through *Rus'* areas made use of an earlier transaction network, relying on the linguistic and cultural similarity between people speaking Baltic Finnic and eastern Finno-Ugrian languages.⁹³ Scandinavians were thus actually just taking over an already existing communication network, when it became economically profitable in early Viking Age. Callmer's theories, however, have not been developed much further.

1.3.4 *Interpreting the “Scandinavian” in Archaeological Evidence*

Since the interpretations that follow in this book will greatly rely on archaeological material, some additional questions arise, specific to the discipline, concerning the character and meaning of “Scandinavian” in archaeology. The specific problems however derive from more general interpretational biases, as were described earlier in this chapter.

There is a long-lasting tradition in Eastern European archaeology to consider Scandinavian influence as an indication of a somewhat “higher” culture.

90 Callmer 2000.

91 1993b; 1994a.

92 Klejn 1994; Lebedev 1994; Panchenko *et al.* 1994; Trigger 1994.

93 Jansson 2000; Sindbæk 2005: 240–244; Ambrosiani & Bäck 2007.

Lebedev's and V. Bulkin's works suggested that Scandinavian-influenced material was a necessary precursor to early urban centres.⁹⁴ These attitudes have often biased interpretations of find material east of the Baltic Sea and in Russia, where a Scandinavian influence is frequently preferred, and alternatives excluded.

In Eastern Baltic archaeology, one of the main restrictions in evaluating the "Scandinavian influences" is the lack of broader context. Estonian and even Livic evidence is seldom, if ever, used by ethnic Baltic archaeologists for comparison, and the Scandinavian impact on archaeological material from Couronia, for instance, is therefore assessed by comparison with inland Baltic areas, and not other coastal areas further north.⁹⁵ Historical sources are often favoured over archaeological evidence, that is, Scandinavian influence has been attributed preferentially in areas where this influence has also been described in some historical documents. Even when looking at specific artefacts or sites, the questions remain, whether and to what extent we can assume a Scandinavian impact on them.

It is easy to see Scandinavian influence in graves with specific artefacts that have no prototypes in the culture of the local population. Oval brooches and Thor's hammers in graves in Russia and elsewhere in areas where they are normally rarely found, indisputably indicate the presence of people from Scandinavia at one time.⁹⁶ Oval brooches of Nordic types do indicate female Scandinavians, but weapons in male graves, although frequently taken as evidence of Scandinavians too, are less certain proof. Many weapon types were characterised by a wide international distribution. A great many swords and spearheads found in Middle Sweden and, for instance, in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic are simply identical. The same is true for boat rivets that are identical in, for instance, Middle Sweden, Finland, and Estonia, and have been found in great numbers in all these areas.⁹⁷

When Scandinavian influence is "proved" by some specific features in burial customs like ritual damage of grave goods or sooty layers in graves, it is however much more doubtful evidence, as such features have been characteristically found in much broader areas.⁹⁸ Occasionally one can find articles in which artefacts referred to as "Scandinavian" in Russia represent common types in

94 Jansson 1997: 25 and references Nosov *et al.* 2005: 18 and references.

95 E.g. Žulkus 2000, 2007.

96 Jansson 1997.

97 Larsson 2007: 185–216.

98 For the definition of Scandinavian material in Russia see e.g. Pushkina 2004.

some neighbouring area, for instance Estonia, although they occasionally have also been found in Scandinavia.⁹⁹

Defining how strong the Scandinavian influence has been in some particular area and period is always a subjective matter, which often seems to be dependent on the educational background and nationality of the individual researcher. It is also essential to differentiate between the evidence from purely Scandinavian graves in an environment with otherwise different evidence, and the local culture that has apparently adapted several Scandinavian features, thus incorporating them into that culture (see in more detail Section 3.5.).

The first possibility is illustrated for instance by the cemeteries with Scandinavian graves in Gnėzdovo and Timerevo in Russia,¹⁰⁰ Grobiņa in Latvia,¹⁰¹ or Kaup-Wiskiauten in Prussia.¹⁰² The influence on the surrounding areas outside these trade centres and cemeteries nevertheless remained quite modest. The other possibility is especially obvious in Finnish and Estonian coastal areas, as well as in Karelia and in prehistoric Livonia in the lower reaches of the River Daugava and north of it in present Latvia. In Livonia and Karelia, the impact from the west influenced even female jewellery – the Scandinavian oval brooches were adapted to local culture and developed into local sub-types.¹⁰³ Belt fittings and other male accessories, as well as weaponry, were in these areas so similar to eastern Scandinavian ones that no ethnic differentiation is possible while relying only on grave goods.¹⁰⁴ Even the form of burial in several of these areas took the same form as in eastern Scandinavia, especially Gotland. Evidence like this indicates extraordinarily intensive overseas communication, personal contacts, intermarriages, and perhaps new inhabitants, although no special Scandinavian colonies are known in these areas.

There is one more essential factor in the interpretation of archaeological evidence. When comparing Late Iron Age Eastern Baltic archaeological material in the northern and southern part of this region, the different character of burial customs creates a certain psychological bias in the assessment of the finds. The ethnic Balts had individual graves, in large areas even inhumations, where grave goods of preservable materials were intact and therefore often very attractive. The Baltic Finnic inhabitants in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, on the other hand, used to bury their dead cremated, often in stone

99 E.g. Eremeev 2007: 253–254.

100 Jansson 1997; Pushkina 2005.

101 Nerman 1958; Mugurēvičs 1997; Jansson 2000.

102 Sedov 1987: 402.

103 Kochkurkina 1981; Spirģis 2008.

104 Māģi 2005b, 2011b.

graves where all the bones of the deceased were mixed with each other. Grave goods were intentionally destroyed before being put on a pyre and often melted in a fierce fire (Figure 1.2.). What is more, only a few pieces of these burnt artefacts were deposited in the stone graves, probably following a sort of *pars pro toto* principle when picking them up from the pyre site.¹⁰⁵ Although artefact types, even after these rituals, are frequently recognisable, these finds are never considered to be as attractive as intact grave goods, thus easily creating a thoughtless interpretation of “poor” graves and, by extension, of “poor” culture.

The great exception among Baltic Finnic burial customs was the Livs, who, beginning in the second half of the 10th century, predominantly practised inhumation, frequently with abundant metal artefacts. In Saaremaa individual cremation graves of the same period demonstrate, in the items that had been put on the pyre together with the individual bodies, approximately the same diversity and abundance of grave goods as the Livs.¹⁰⁶ Finnish Viking

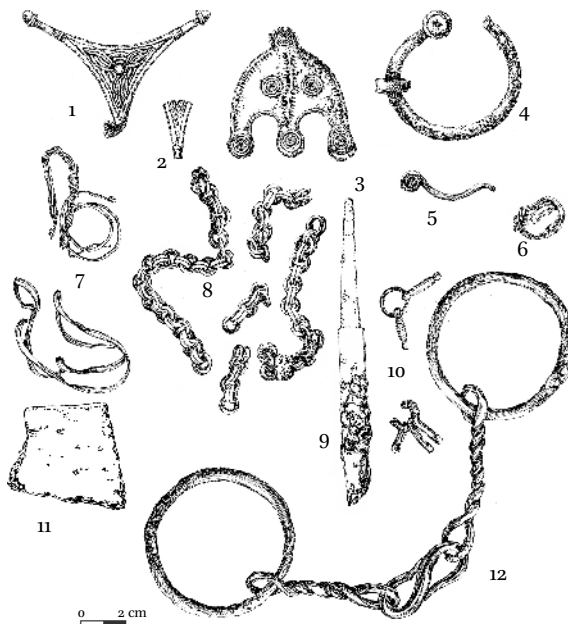


FIGURE 1.2 Artefacts from a female cremation burial at Rahu cemetery, complex No IV, probably the second half of the 10th century (TLU AI 4239: 44, 22, 35, 20, 18, 45, 42, 38, 36, 41, 25, 43; Mägi 2002, Pl. 53).

105 Selirand 1974; Karvonen 1998; Mägi 2002; Mandel 2003; Wickholm & Raninen 2006.

106 Mägi 2002.

Age inhumations are known from Eura parish, and, although not as abundant as the Livic graves, their find composition resembles that known from several Baltic areas, too.¹⁰⁷

The Viking Age burial customs in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic may be one of the reasons why artefacts of the same types as in Scandinavia have generally been overlooked in archaeological interpretations. This is, however, a phenomenon that will be looked at more closely in the following chapters of this book.

1.4 Conclusions

Archaeological thought has developed divergently in different countries east of the Baltic Sea, being linked with the cultural background and history of each particular land. At least culturally, the Baltic States have less in common than generally believed. First of all, the area is divided between two language families, causing barriers to communication, in our own time and probably in the past as well. The border between two language families, as it appears today, also seems to mark the border between the interpretations of prehistoric local social systems.

The tendency to project the contemporary political situation back into history can be seen as one of the main reasons why the great majority of publications treating communication across the Baltic Sea during late prehistory and the following medieval period concentrate on the relationship between Scandinavia and Russia, taking almost no notice of the area of the present Baltic States. Only during the very last decades, after the Eastern Baltic lands became independent states again, have some scholars started to draw attention to the role of Finnic- and Baltic-speaking peoples in communication across the sea and along the Baltic and Russian rivers.

An historical approach that in places is still strongly influenced by the evolutionary theories considers the late prehistoric northern half of the Eastern Baltic as less socially developed when compared with the southern half of this area. This interpretation is rooted in differences in archaeological material, which are the result of clearly distinct burial customs among the Finnic-speaking and Baltic-speaking inhabitants of the Eastern Baltic. How dissimilar the societies in these two Eastern Baltic cultural regions might have been, and what these differences consisted of precisely, will be discussed in the following chapter.

107 Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982a, 1982b, 2000.

Clan-Based Collectivists or Hierarchical Individualists? Late Prehistoric Societies in the Eastern Baltic

Taking into consideration Viking Age trade routes and nodal points in the present Eastern Baltic, researchers face the question of the structure of local society in this period – the structure of the cultural landscape is inseparable from the ruling social system. It is also relevant to take into consideration the ethnic diversity of the Eastern Baltic, which was and still is conspicuous in comparison with the rest of northern Europe.¹ The same variability presumably characterised pre-state political systems in this area – or at least our interpretations of them tend to be diverse.

In the Baltic States where the cultural-historical approach dominated history writing and archaeology up to the middle of the 20th century, prehistoric society has long been seen only through the lens of historical descriptions, and not defined through more theoretical concepts. In Latvia and Estonia it meant predominantly the interpretation of Henry's *Chronicle of Livonia*, which was written down at the request of the bishop of Riga in the 1220s, in addition to which came the *Older Rhyme Chronicle of Livonia*, completed in the 1290s by an unknown author in charge of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order. A somewhat greater variability of written sources characterises the early history of Lithuania, where the centralised state had started to take shape as early as the 11th–12th centuries.

Archaeological thought about prehistoric social systems has developed somewhat divergently in different countries east of the Baltic Sea, being linked with the cultural background and history of each particular land. On the other hand, several ideas about prehistoric societies have been so general that they can fit quite as well with any pre-state European community, especially as these were envisioned in the period between the world wars.

¹ It should be kept in mind that although the terms “Baltic” and “Balts” in English texts normally designate all the inhabitants of present-day Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, in eastern Baltic publications these names are in most cases reserved only for those people in the region who speak Baltic languages, that is, the inhabitants of Latvia and Lithuania.

2.1 Finland

On the wave of national romantic visions, the first picture of Finnish Late Iron Age society was presented by Johann Reinhold Aspelin as early as the late 19th century. His interpretation was greatly based on folk songs, as well as the general ideas of his time. So, for instance, he believed that there existed kings, magnates, a peasantry, and slaves, but the kings were actually just heroes more powerful than ordinary people. Common important problems, like defence or other military actions, were discussed in assemblies of all free men. Aspelin suggested that trade played a crucial role in the development of Finnish society, and he also gave a list of commodities essential in this development: furs, honey, fish, tar, pine resin, and slaves, especially slave girls. There had been several trading places in late prehistoric Finland, although Aspelin was not able to prove their existence.² The importance of international trade, especially through the impact from Scandinavia and particularly Birka, has also been mentioned by several later researchers, e.g. Ella Kivikoski or Nils Cleve.³

Analysing the Late Iron Age inhumation cemetery at Köyliö, Cleve considered the people buried there to be members of an ordinary village community, and presented a vision of society as comparatively egalitarian, although some burials had been equipped with clearly more abundant find assemblages than others. He believed that Gotlandic trade and contacts with the eastern Baltic vitalised Finnish culture starting from the end of the 10th century, thus underlining the importance of foreign contacts.⁴

Researchers have had different opinions about how great a part hunting and fishing played in Late Iron Age Finnish society. As a relevant source for survival strategies and for the exploitation of the wilderness, hunting has been especially emphasised, linking its importance primarily with the international fur trade.⁵ Aarne Michaël Tallgren suggested in the 1930s that Late Iron Age society in Finland was egalitarian, with a common ownership of land, and without any clear stratum of aristocracy.⁶ This vision of Finnish prehistoric society being egalitarian and even primitive was supported by Helmer Salmo.⁷ A more hierarchical picture, characterised by chieftains, a large stratum of free

² Aspelin 1885: 63–95.

³ Kivikoski 1939: 244–245; Cleve 1978: 204–205.

⁴ Cleve 1978: 204–208.

⁵ Voionmaa 1947: 29–32, 245–253.

⁶ Tallgren 1931: 245–248.

⁷ Salmo 1952: 458–464.

peasants and a small number of slaves, was suggested by Alfred Hackman and Kivikoski.⁸

In the 1980s, Pirkko-Liisa Lehtosalo-Hilander presented a vision of Late Iron Age Finnish society, based mainly on the cemetery at Luistari in the Eura parish in the western part of the country.⁹ Luistari is one of the three known and excavated inhumation cemeteries in Finland that are dated to the whole period from the 5th century up to the 12th century. Lehtosalo-Hilander pointed out the international character of male accessories uncovered in this cemetery, while female ornaments and dress seemed to have been much more local. She interpreted the society buried in Luistari as that of “peasant traders”, associating it with a possible fur-market in the neighbourhood, and trade contacts with Birka. The trade, she believed, became most intensive after the end of the 10th century,¹⁰ and this does nevertheless argue against the importance of Birka, which had ceased to exist by then. The main reason to believe in the intensification of international contacts especially in the 11th century seems to be the increase of imported grave goods.

In the society represented by the three inhumation cemeteries in Eura, including the Luistari cemetery, weapons appear to have played a significant and essential role, since a great many more weapons have been found in them than for instance in Birka cemeteries, which altogether contain approximately the same number of burials.¹¹ Burials equipped with significantly more goods than others are nevertheless absent among the Late Iron Age archaeological evidence in Finland. Lehtosalo-Hilander’s interpretation was that real chieftains did not exist in Late Iron Age Finland, and the highest stratum of society consisted of powerful peasants and tradesmen. She did not however offer a more detailed description of the assumed social systems.¹²

Lehtosalo-Hilander also pointed out the significant role of women in late prehistoric Finnish society, including participation in trade, a role that was indicated not only by abundant grave goods in women’s burials but also by scales and weights in at least one female grave.¹³

A similar, simplified view of late prehistoric society was supported by other scholars in the 1980s. The society was depicted as quite egalitarian, with some small chieftains who could have been called “kings” but whose power

8 Hackman 1938: 180; Kivikoski 1939: 250; 1961: 292.

9 Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982b.

10 Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982b: 77–78.

11 Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982b: 63.

12 Lehtosalo-Hilander 1984: 346–351.

13 Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982b: 78; 1984: 300–302, 346–347.

was comparatively limited. The largest stratum in society consisted of free peasants of different levels of wealth. Administratively the country was divided between different districts, some of them having strongholds as centres. The main decisions were made in assemblies called *käräjät*, in which all free men could participate. There were slaves as well, but not in considerable numbers.¹⁴

Viking Age society analyses in 1980s Finland concentrated predominantly on inhumation burials, which were exceptional, however, among the rest of the archaeological material in the country. Viking Age burial customs in Finland were otherwise dominated by cremations in stone graves without formal structure, a grave form similar to contemporary Estonia. Carl Fredrik Meinander has interpreted the spread of stone graves without formal structure in the 8th century as the sign of society suddenly turning more egalitarian than before. His arguments were mainly based on the collective character of the stone graves, where both cremations and artefacts were intermingled, without the possibility of associating particular artefacts with individual burials. “Kings” mentioned in Finland by Nordic sagas were, according to him, only elected leaders of expeditions. He also believed that only some members of Finnish society were buried with artefacts before the 8th century, while the stone graves without formal structure were the burial places of whole villages.¹⁵

Meinander’s assessment of Finnish late prehistoric society as egalitarian was supported by Jussi-Pekka Taavitsainen, who analysed social aspects reflected in the erection of hillforts, as well as behind the formation of administrative districts. He believed that building the fortifications did not demand considerable resources and could be done by temporary associations of men from one or several villages, who were gathered for this purpose in case of emergency. He compared these associations with temporary hunting groups. Similarly to the latter, the associations probably functioned under the leadership of a “king”, elected for this particular purpose in the otherwise egalitarian society.¹⁶ The idea of Viking Age society consisting of small units that formed a loosely connected network was also supported by Sami Raninen and Anna Wessman.¹⁷ According to these scholars, no archaeological evidence pointed to any centralised power organisation in Viking Age Finland.

14 Huurre 1983: 215–218.

15 Meinander 1980.

16 Taavitsainen 1990: 148–155.

17 Haggrén *et al.* 2015: 312–320.

Although the collective cremation graves have long been considered insufficiently informative for detailed analysis of society, more attention has been paid to them by different researchers during the last decades. A great part of this research, however, deals mainly with the more theoretical aspects behind the custom of scattering the remains of cremated dead among stones, without paying too much attention to the social system prescribing such burial rites.¹⁸

As for social systems and demography, Sirkku Pihlman's works on Finnish cremation burials should be pointed out in particular.¹⁹ Her point was that only members of upper stratum families were buried in late Iron Age stone graves without formal structure, while the majority of the population were buried in a way that did not leave archaeological traces. Pihlman believed that the spread of population in Late Iron Age Finland was much broader than had been calculated previously, and stone graves only marked a sort of central points in settlements. Only about one third of Viking Age villages could have possessed an archaeologically traceable burial ground. The society itself was hierarchical, but, as Pihlman expressed it, the top of the hierarchical structure was broad. These were select households which exercised power, both in political and ritual ways. In a single district there could however have been several leading households, although some of them could dominate the others from time to time. Social networks between elite families were arranged through military service, marriage, the institution of subsidiary wives (parallel to Scandinavian *frillalag*), and fostering each other's children.

Pihlman believed that slavery played an important role in the late prehistoric Finnish economy, similarly to 11th century Norway where between a fifth and a third of inhabitants were calculated to have been slaves.²⁰ Like several other researchers, she believed that international trade played an essential role, particularly for the development of coastal areas of the country, although she did not suggest that considerable international trade centres existed in these areas.

Pihlman also pointed out that some coastal districts in south-west and west Finland (primarily Satakunta and Finland Proper) were strongly influenced by Scandinavian culture, and the society there could have differed from that in the rest of the country. Part of these areas, although characterised by very Scandinavian-like and warrior-oriented culture in the 5th–6th centuries, became more “Finnish” from the 7th century onwards.²¹

18 E.g. Wessman 2010.

19 2003; 2004.

20 Pihlman 2003, 2004 and references.

21 Pihlman 2003.

Other authors have discussed the phenomenon of the extraordinarily abundant weapon burials that appeared in coastal Finland in the Merovingian period (550–800 AD). Most of them see these burials as a sign of strict hierarchisation that took place under strong influence from the nascent *Svearíki*. Researchers have suggested that alliances between the petty kings in Middle Sweden and the chieftains in Finland defined these relationships, which in coastal Finland were manifested by the use of international or Middle Swedish types of weapons and Nordic style ornamentation.²² Sami Raninen believed that Merovingian period Finland could be characterised as the “Big Man” society, where the Finnish elites managed contacts with Scandinavian potentates in order to raise their own social prestige.²³

Jaana Riikonen, a specialist in Late Iron Age textile finds in Finland, has supported the vision of a hierarchical society. Her argumentation relied on the fact that high quality and even luxurious silk, gold, and silver threaded clothes, as had been found, for instance, in 11th–12th-century male burials in Kirkkomäki cemetery, were characteristic only of the members of the elite in contemporary Scandinavia and Western Europe. It was hardly plausible, according to Riikonen, that the Finnish owners of these textiles, who at the same time had often been buried with several weapons, were only ordinary peasants. Instead, people buried in late prehistoric Finnish graves were most likely members of local social elites, who demonstrated their status in the same way as their status-fellows in contemporary West European areas.²⁴

2.2 Estonia

The interpretation of Estonian prehistoric society has been modelled on the earlier derogatory attitudes towards local peoples practised by Baltic German and Russian 18th–19th-century scholars (see in more detail Sections 1.1. and 1.2.). Even in later times, the national-romantic view of the prehistoric past included an idealised image of early society as firmly egalitarian and more or less democratic, less developed than most of its neighbours, but pacifistic and harmonious. As characteristic of earlier studies, the picture presented was based predominantly on early written sources, which in the case of Estonia

22 Schauman-Lönnqvist 1996: 134.

23 Raninen 2005.

24 Riikonen 2006.

meant mainly the *Chronicle of Henry the Livonian* from the first quarter of the 13th century.

The earliest academic interpretation of Estonian society in late prehistory is compendiously presented in Harri Moora's book on Estonian prehistory, published in 1926. Moora believed that Estonian prehistoric society consisted of more or less equal peasants, some of them practising trade as a sideline. The main commodities sold were fur and valuables, especially female slaves, obtained in plundering raids to other countries.²⁵ *Seniores* and *meliores* mentioned by Henry the Livonian were men wiser, and perhaps also wealthier, than others, who had been elected as village leaders. However, a more fixed and hereditary hierarchy was already developing, especially among the leaders of bigger districts.

The country was, according to these ideas, divided into districts called *kihelkond*, most of them having a hill-fort as their political centre. These strongholds were however interpreted as purely military structures, erected with the cooperation of the villages of a district. Besides the district-level *seniores*, power was practised through assemblies called *kärjad*, in which not all men but only the village leaders participated. Military conflicts between districts were rare, and campaigns were arranged predominantly against areas outside the territory of present-day Estonia, preferably against those not inhabited by other Finnic-speaking peoples. The society was strictly patriarchal and polygamous marriages were practised, especially among the Saaremaa inhabitants who had adopted this custom from the Scandinavians. Slaves existed but their number was small, and they were mainly foreigners imprisoned during plundering raids.²⁶

Moora, together with Artur Vassar, also led the interpretation of Estonian prehistoric society after Estonia was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, now in accordance with Marxist historical materialism. Late Iron Age society was now, under political pressure, regarded as feudal, with a "compulsory" class struggle.²⁷ During the "thawing" of the Soviet political system in the 1960s Moora and Herbert Ligi classified Estonian Late Iron Age (ca 800–1200/1250 AD) society as being in the stage of "forming feudal relations", with moderate social and economic stratification.²⁸ Nevertheless, they believed Estonian

25 Moora 1926a: 50–55.

26 Moora 1926a: 56–71; Moora *et al.* 1935: 197–200; Moora 1939.

27 Moora 1954; Vassar 1955.

28 Ligi & Moora 1964; Ligi 1968.

society to have been less developed than that of its eastern and southern neighbours, thus propagating the same earlier concept that later in the 1990s was pointedly named “prehistoric pessimism” by Priit Ligi.²⁹

The interpretation of a more or less egalitarian Late Iron Age society, as had already been generally postulated in the 1920s and 1930s, flourished in Estonian archaeology up to the mid-1990s, and, in the study of the early Middle Ages, even up to the very end of the 20th century.³⁰ The great majority of Late Iron Age Estonians were believed to have been free peasants, and a small group of *meliores* and *seniores* were essentially defined as wealthy peasants. The slaves that were mentioned in written sources were interpreted only as foreign captives and their descendants. The economic base for the elite was seen in the ownership of land, but taxes were regarded mainly as “compulsory gifts for chieftains”. The society of west Estonia and the islands was seen as even less developed than in southern Estonia, because the chronicler Henry the Livonian never mentioned chieftains there by name. The great strongholds of Saaremaa and west Estonia were used as evidence of a more egalitarian society in these districts, too, with the argument that the erection of such strong forts was possible only collectively.³¹

The main justifications for assessing Estonian Late Iron Age society as egalitarian were the lack of very rich graves or remains of skilled workshops, and the small amount of luxury foreign artefacts in Estonian archaeological material.³² Such ideas were however generated mostly by oversimplified interpretation of archaeological material, the specific character of the findings, and the very limited variation between excavated sites. Owing to general ideas in archaeology, especially during the first half of the 20th century, graves were clearly preferred when selecting sites to be excavated (Figure 2.1.), while settlements with their fewer possibilities for replenishing archaeological collections with “beautiful” finds drew only limited attention. In the cemeteries studied, where until the late 12th century cremation was dominant, artefacts were usually mixed and often badly burned fragments, thus creating an unfounded vision of “poor” graves of egalitarian village inhabitants (Figure 2.2.; see also Section 1.3.4.).³³

29 1995.

30 Kustin 1962; Ligi 1968; Selirand 1974; Jaanits *et al.* 1982; Kahk & Tarvel 1997: 26–29.

31 Jaanits *et al.* 1982: 412–413.

32 Ligi & Moora 1964; Tarvel 1992: 116–126.

33 Kustin 1962; Selirand 1974.



FIGURE 2.1 *Find complex A at the Uugla I grave in West Estonia. 11th–12th-century artefacts, some of them more, some less burnt, are scattered between stones without any formal structure. Cremated bones are scattered in similar way, without distinguishable individual burials. (Mandel 2003, Pl. XLVI).*

Shortage of intact artefacts might be one, albeit completely unjustified, reason why Soviet-period archaeologists and historians in Estonia agreed in depicting local late prehistoric handicraft and trade as only very moderately developed. The idea was supported by scanty archaeological evidence of workshops and trade centres, or, indeed, even ordinary settlements. At the same time all the more attractive items among the archaeological material, for instance belt decorations or weapons, were believed to have been produced in Scandinavia.³⁴

34 Moora & Ligi 1970; Selirand 1974.

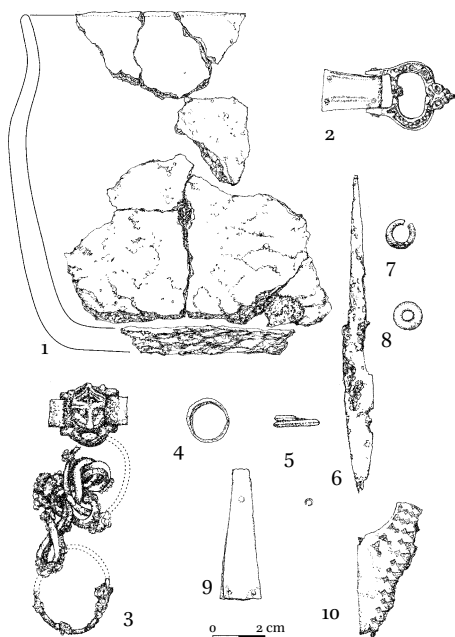


FIGURE 2.2
Fragmentary artefacts at Kāku VI stone cist
grave, Saaremaa, male cremation grave,
11th century. (TLU AI 3995: 139 and 172, 100,
181, 89, 65, 76, 107, 178, 170, 135; Mägi 2002,
Pl. 6).

2.2.1 From Egalitarian Society to Deep Social Stratification

New approaches appeared in the study of Estonian prehistoric society in the 1990s, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, when local archaeologists acquired access to the archaeological thought that had developed in Scandinavia and Western Europe in the meantime. The first to come out with new interpretations was Priit Ligi, who, in accordance with Valter Lang's study of early agriculture, put forward a theory that a socially and economically stratified society had been established in Estonia as early as the Late Bronze Age (1000–500 BC). From the Roman Iron Age (50–450 AD) they found it possible to speak of the first large landed estates and of dependence based on private ownership of land, and accordingly also about well-developed social stratification.³⁵

Post-Soviet-era interpretations of prehistoric society in Estonia were summarised in Ligi's article in 1995, published posthumously.³⁶ There he claimed that private ownership of arable land, and accordingly chiefdoms, formed in Estonia as early as 1000 BC. He even went a step further and claimed that the first pre-state formations with petty kings as their leaders could have appeared in Estonian territory during the first centuries AD – with a reference to Lotte

³⁵ Lang & Ligi 1991; Ligi 1995; Lang 1996.

³⁶ Ligi 1995.

Hedeager who had made the same claim for Denmark. Lang supported the idea of landed private property but did not see the formulation of chiefdoms in such an early period. Nevertheless, closer definition of the society, if not as a chiefdom, was and is still avoided in his writings, and his general depictions of society still seem to assume a social order akin to chiefdom.³⁷

Ligi's vision of Estonian prehistoric society starting from the Roman Iron Age presupposed that it was deeply hierarchical, in the state-making stage of development. All further arguments in his approaches proceeded from this initial statement, and features that did not fit his new theory were left aside or treated with often somewhat questionable methods. The shortage of weapons in Estonian graves up to the 10th century, which was in striking contrast to neighbouring areas, was, for instance, attributed to a peaceful political environment. He also suggested that Estonia's position at the crossroads of international trade resulted in closer than ordinary integration between the petty kingdoms, thus avoiding military conflict. Lack of princely or even individual graves was, according to the same line of argument, assumed to be the result of a well-established political structure, or it was simply assumed that such graves would be found in future.³⁸

Ligi saw international trade as an important factor influencing the social development in Estonia starting from the 10th, or even the 11th century. The Estonian role in trade during the first half of the Viking Age, as well as the 8th century, was nevertheless, according to Ligi, modest, although several artefacts of Scandinavian origin in Estonia demonstrated "peaceful" communication. He believed that the main reason for the absence of trade centres in Early Viking Age Estonia was the limited centralisation of political power; why, for instance, the complex of Iru could not be considered a trade centre, was not discussed. However, the situation changed around 1000 AD, when written sources recorded campaigns to the territory of present Estonia, both from the west and from the east. It brought further centralisation of power, resulting in petty kingdoms at district level at the turn of the 12th–13th centuries.

Ligi's article, although heavily criticised immediately after publication, soon developed as a cornerstone of the interpretation of Estonian prehistoric society. Nevertheless, in 1995, when Ligi formulated his ideas, Estonian archaeological evidence was interpreted only on a very modest and, pejoratively, "traditional" level, hardly reaching further than finding counterpart artefacts from archaeological sites in other areas. Human bones uncovered in large quantities

37 Lang 1996: 465ff; 2007: 221–265.

38 Ligi 1995.

in burial places were not studied biologically at all, although burials were used as one of the basic arguments in his analyses.

Some aspects of Estonian late prehistoric society have been touched on in works by Lang even after his cooperation with Ligi in the 1990s. With references to Eerik Laid³⁹ and Evald Tõnisson,⁴⁰ Lang pointed to a possible dual power division in Late Iron Age Estonia, which could be traced, as he believed, in taxation records of late medieval written sources. He interpreted Estonian hill-forts as elite residences and taxation centres, and not entirely military constructions as was widely assumed in earlier discussions.⁴¹ Generally similar ideas were supported by the author of the present book. Society on Saaremaa was in the early 2000s depicted as being similar to Viking Age Gotland or Sweden, and accordingly defined as based on chiefdoms in terms of political anthropology.⁴²

The vision of Estonian prehistoric society that was created in the 1990s was closely connected with general political ideas at that time, primarily with ambitions to be (re)united with Europe, especially Northern Europe. Researchers who were active in these processes unconsciously projected their expectations back into prehistory, patterning prehistoric society after Scandinavian, especially the Middle Swedish society. It often meant, however, the avoidance of controversial arguments or simply a lack of sufficient evidence.

Ligi and Lang's vision of Estonian prehistoric society has nevertheless remained widespread in Estonian archaeology, and arguments presented against it in recent years by, for instance, the author of this book, have been generally neglected. Andres Tvauri's description of prehistoric society in Estonia from the Migration Period to the Viking Age relied almost entirely on the aforementioned authors.⁴³ As an addition he suggested that Estonia was hit by a serious population decrease caused by the climatic catastrophe in the year 536 AD. As a proof of this he used the scantiness of graves and other archaeological evidence in the 6th–9th centuries. New graves with abundant artefacts, which appeared in late 10th century, were then explained by the increase of population again after the nearly 500-year-long crisis period.⁴⁴ In his interpretation of prehistoric society, Tvauri took for granted that it looked like the contemporary Scandinavian one. Such an approach allowed him to use abundant parallels

39 1939.

40 1999.

41 Lang 2002, 2011.

42 Mägi 2002.

43 Tvauri 2012.

44 Tvauri 2012: 305–311.

taken from the Scandinavian world; for instance, he was able to present a vision of the lifestyle of the Estonian elite, based on data in Scandinavian sagas, with the only difference pointed out by him being that hunting was not considered an elite occupation among Estonian upper-class warriors, since no artefacts connected with this activity had been found in local graves.⁴⁵

Tvauri generally shared the opinion of earlier researchers, that the level of development of handicraft in the territory of present Estonia up to the 11th century was comparatively low. The only exceptions were iron manufacturing and the production of weapons, probably because Jüri Peets and Kristina Creutz had meanwhile proved the widespread and high-standard practice of these activities in late Viking Age Estonia.⁴⁶ The scanty evidence of casting moulds in Estonia could indicate, according to Tvauri, that multiple bronze artefacts were still imported from Scandinavia or other Baltic lands.⁴⁷ Recent research on Viking Age Estonian artefacts decorated in Scandinavian styles has however demonstrated that these objects were predominantly produced locally, which is probably even more true for artefacts in local styles.⁴⁸

Tvauri believed, with references to Ligi and Lang, that chieftains or petty kings with their retainers resided in hill-forts, and that the existence of these leaders in itself proved that a part of the land was rented out to peasants. Otherwise it would have been difficult to arrange and finance the erection and maintenance of such large fortifications. There existed a sort of internal hierarchy among the chieftains, which resembled early feudal relationships. Peasants lived in single farms with 6–8 inhabitants in each, and proper villages appeared – in parallel with Denmark, as Tvauri believes – only in the late Viking Age. There were also a certain number of slaves in Estonian society, but, because of their high price, only the elite families could afford to possess them.⁴⁹

2.2.2 *Clan Societies with Corporate Power Structures*

During the last decade, the interpretation of Estonian prehistoric society has been reconsidered, first of all by the author of the present book. Indeed, when treating archaeological evidence as the first source for interpretations, and only secondarily relying on evolutionary concepts, the picture changes. Considering Estonian archaeological evidence in the *longue durée* perspective, discrepancies separating the local archaeological evidence from that of

45 Tvauri 2012: 317–318.

46 Creutz 2003; Peets 2003.

47 Tvauri 2012: 209–214.

48 Jets 2012.

49 Tvauri 2012: 312–321.



FIGURE 2.3 *Maidla stone grave with mixed cremations in West Estonia, 10th–12th centuries. (Mandel 2003, Pl. X: 2).*

Scandinavia, as well as the southern half of the Eastern Baltic, are considerable. First of all this is obvious in the character of burial rites, but is more or less traceable in all the archaeological evidence (Figure 2.3.).

Aspects of ritual practice within a religious context reflect existing power relationships between individuals and kin groups, and as these change, the specifics for the ritual itself may vary, or new meanings may appear based on these societal dynamics.⁵⁰ The challenge for archaeologists is to analyse the way it happens. Estonian burial customs have since the Bronze Age demonstrated collective features, where parts of skeletons from individuals of both sexes and different ages have been intentionally mixed together. Especially in the graves of some periods it is clear that the bodies have been displayed somewhere to decay, and only selected bones have thereafter been deposited in a stone grave, or in certain periods probably also cremated before this final act. This phenomenon dominated through all periods from the Bronze Age until conversion to Christianity in the first half of the 13th century, with few

⁵⁰ Aldenderfer 2010.

exceptional periods or sites, and is in striking contrast to the western and southern neighbouring areas of what is now Estonia.

To draw cultural and anthropological parallels, collective secondary burials where bones of all the deceased, possibly family or clan members, were mixed, tended to characterise predominantly societies with corporate power organisation, often tribal societies with extensive agriculture. If one wants to categorise social systems, these communities can rather be described as segmentary societies, and not as chiefdoms; however, these terms are so fluid that it actually makes more sense to avoid them altogether. The property of arable lands in these societies tended to be collective, clan-based, and the descent system could frequently be matrilineal, with matrilocal residence often practised. Social organisation consisted of rankings arranged mainly according to clan or family affiliation. As a sort of paradox, several such societies have been described as very warlike. These communities were led by “kings” or leaders who could from time to time organise people for tremendous efforts, e.g. monumental building works, but whose individual power was actually unstable and rested mainly upon the power of their families.⁵¹

The best examples of such societies (or at least some of the best investigated using cross-cultural methods) in a similar climatic environment to northern Europe were native North Americans before acculturation. Outside Europe, such social organisations are or were known in nearly every part of the world, but they are comparatively rare. In European prehistory, a parallel can be drawn with several Neolithic cultures, e.g. Megalith Culture.⁵² The 7th–early-13th-century Estonian area was characterised by mainly collective cremation cemeteries, where bones of several dozen of the deceased were scattered among stones, without individual burials being marked. Exceptionally, individual cremation graves inside stone kerbs occurred on Viking Age Saaremaa, after which these were generally replaced by intermingled burials in stone graves without formal structure. A local feature of the burial places on Saaremaa was that, in contrast with the widespread custom on the Estonian mainland, individual graves could sometimes be differentiated in Saaremaa graves.

Individual burials in sand barrows also appeared in the south-eastern part of present-day Estonia starting from the 5th century, as well as in other eastern parts of the country in the late Viking Age. A few inhumations occurred in these areas at the end of the 10th century, when this new, individual burial

51 For cross-cultural parallels see e.g. Keesing 1981: 221–300; Fagan 1991: 419–426; Williams 1997.

52 E.g. Gebauer 2012.

custom started to spread westwards. By the 12th century single inhumation cemeteries were spread over the whole mainland part of the country. In these, both men and women were predominantly buried with their heads towards the north or north-west, and female burials were normally supplied with considerably greater quantities of metal grave goods than males.

Up to the second half of the 10th century, only a few artefacts or none at all were put in graves, and the number of known burial places is small. The latter can however be caused by the lack of artefacts – if, for instance, the stone graves dated to post-950 had been used before this time, we are unable to detect such earlier use. The custom of not providing the dead with grave goods, especially when cremated burials were also mixed with each other, makes it really complicated to locate any burial places. The situation changed in the second half of the 10th century, when artefacts reappeared in graves, probably as an indication of altered images of the Beyond. In the course of the 11th and 12th centuries the amount of grave goods increased remarkably. These modifications probably indicated changes in the social system, most likely a further stratification of society, and perhaps movement towards more individual-based hierarchical systems.

As in Finland, the modern interpretation of Late Iron Age stone cemeteries is that these were burial places of some selected families, while the majority of people were buried in some way that did not leave archaeological traces. The increased amount of luxurious artefacts in these burial places in the course of the 11th–12th centuries probably points to a deepened social differentiation between these families and the rest of the population. The internal stratification between these dominant families can easily be seen in the different size of stone graves, as well as the composition of finds unearthed in them.⁵³

Another aspect that differentiates the society reflected in Estonian stone graves from its southern and western neighbours is gender-specific. Single burial complexes and inhumation graves indicate that a great part of jewellery and dress accessories were non-gendered, and attributes normally associated with the other gender sometimes occurred in both male and female graves. Weapons in female graves, a phenomenon that in these areas characterised only graves where the deceased was also abundantly equipped with jewellery and more specific female attributes, suggest that women could have access to some power structures. Weapons put in graves functioned in that case as symbols of power. Single examples or even collections of female ornaments in some abundantly equipped male graves could, on similar lines, indicate their

53 Mägi 2002: 125–137.

position in clan hierarchy, or family affiliation (see more detailed discussion in Section 2.5.3.).⁵⁴

The new picture of the late prehistoric Estonian social system imagines it as pyramidal, with the top consisting of elite families, who were the only ones buried in stone graves. The stratum of free peasants and especially people without landed estate might have been much broader. There are no data of how many slaves there were in Late Iron Age Estonian society, but their number might have been considerably greater than believed earlier.⁵⁵ The position of women was assessed as having been comparatively high.⁵⁶

2.3 Latvia and Lithuania⁵⁷

In the view of the cultural-historical school, the prehistoric society of Latvia has long been seen only through the prism of historical descriptions, and not defined through more theoretical concepts. The dominant questions have traditionally been those connected with ethnicity, frequently based just on artefact material or burial rites.

The vision of Latvian Late Iron Age society took more detailed shape in the publications of the early 20th century. Roberts Johanness Klaustiņš contributed to it with the analysis of Latvia's extraordinarily rich folk song collections, assuming for the first time that the power of the Latvian upper-class (*bajari*) was based on large landed estates. He believed that retainers of *bajari* were, like the Russian *druzhina*, called *draudze*.⁵⁸

The main addition to this picture was, during the first independent state period of the Latvian republic in the 1920s and 1930s, an emphasis on the democratic character of prehistoric society, even if at first glance this might seem a somewhat contradictory view. It was believed, for instance, that all Latvians were free and equal, both in terms of wealth and social rank. There was, however, an aristocracy (Henry the Livonian's *seniores* and *meliores*, folk songs *bajari*), who owned castles and large landed estates, and commanded the army.⁵⁹ The idea of state formation in prehistoric Latvia was strongly advocated during the inter-war period and even later by historian Arveds Švābe,

54 Māgi 2002: 75–83; 2009a.

55 Māgi 2002: 145–146.

56 Māgi 2002: 146–148; 2009a; 2013b.

57 Several ethnic areas are in our day actually divided between Latvia and Lithuania.

58 *Drug* in Russian and *draugs* in Latvian both mean “friend”; Līgi 1968 and references.

59 Balodis 1926: 80–81.

who believed that Jersika played a central role in the political arena of late prehistoric Latvia. The State of Jersika was, according to him, characterised by inherited power held by a local king with the support of the princes of the Kiev-Rus principedom of Polotsk. Other state-like formations in the neighbourhood of Jersika, Koknes and Tālava, were then believed to have been formed by the king of Jersika as a sort of buffer state.⁶⁰

The Soviet occupation in the 1940s brought with it, in Latvia as in the other Baltic States, the revisionist view of prehistory according to the explanation of social development within the dogmatic Marxist framework. The new ideas were applied in a book by Estonian archaeologist Harri Moora on primitive and early medieval society in Latvia,⁶¹ and remained a cornerstone in Latvian archaeology up until the 1990s. According to the new scheme, the transition to class society took place in the territory of present-day Latvia in the Middle Iron Age (400–900 AD), and feudal relationships emerged in the following period, that is, starting from the 10th century.⁶²

Estonian historian Herbert Ligi, who wrote his most prominent works in the 1960s, supported the interpretation that both early-13th-century Latvia and Estonia, but especially Latvia, could be described as being in the process of forming feudal structures. The *Chronicle of Henry the Livonian* reveals, as Ligi pointed out, the quite strong position of the local leaders, with whom the representatives of the Crusaders had to negotiate about all possible actions. The chronicler used the same term – *seniores* – not only for the locals, but also for some Germans, thus attributing to the local leaders power that could be comparable with German noblemen.⁶³ Whether and to what extent the reality corresponded to Henry's vision nevertheless remains unclear.

Ligi believed that the term *seniores*, as it was used by Henry, could mean all kinds of influential persons, including those whose power in reality was quite limited, e.g. the heads of villages. *Meliores* and *nobiles*, on the other hand, were reserved for leaders with real power, thus indicating stratification within the upper stratum. Princes (*princeps*) of both Sēmgallia and Latgallia have been mentioned in 13th-century documents, indicating the princes of Koknes and Jersika, as well as equivalent leaders in the Sēmgallian area.⁶⁴ In early-13th-century Latgallia and Sēmgallia power was probably inheritable, the best

60 Šnē 2005: 57 and references.

61 Moora 1952.

62 Apals *et al.* 1974: 133–285.

63 Ligi 1968: 14–26.

64 Ligi 1968: 16–20.

example of this being the story of Talibaldis, head of the Latgallians in Tālava, whose power was passed on to his sons after his death.

According to Henry's *Chronicle* the Livs paid tribute to the princes of Polotsk in the early 13th century, but no real princedoms as in the Latgallian area were described among the Livs. In contrast to their ethnic Baltic neighbours, the chieftains of the Livs were mainly referred to as "the elders and the betters" (*seniores et meliores*), and although one of their rulers Kaupo was described as "like a king and elder" (*quasi rex et senior*), his political influence seems to have been very limited.⁶⁵

The smallest unit of Latvian society was believed to have been the family and household, and some related households probably formed kin groups. Indrikis Šterns has calculated that the household consisted of 15–20 people, and kin groups of 20–25 households.⁶⁶ Power was exercised through assemblies that were called together to make decisions and pass laws, the implementation of which required the support of all social strata and touched directly upon the lives of everyone. The upper strata were formed by elders (*seniores*), best men (*meliore*s), and military leaders (*dux, princeps*). The chronicle mentioned "friends and relatives", normally understood as retainers of some *senior*. The power might have been hereditary, as indicated by the fact that the sons of *seniores* were always taken as hostages.

Jānis Apals and Ēvalds Mugurēvičs have concluded in the latest overview publication of the earliest Latvian history that the territory of late prehistoric Latvia was arranged according to castle districts, which included several villages and parishes.⁶⁷ The total number of inhabited castles in Late Iron Age Latvia might have been about 250–300, of which some were centres of states, lands, or districts. They believe that hill-fort districts were called "lands" (*terra, land*) in early 13th-century written sources. There were nine such lands in Couronia, and seven in Semgallia. In Couronia (lands in the lower Venta River ruled by Lemmekinus) and Latgallia (Jersika, Koknes, Tālava, and others), early state formations could be found which, however, were not consolidated to the same level as the state organisation in Lithuania in the same period. In addition, they believed that no state-like formations existed in the lands inhabited by the Livs.

As for social stratification in Late Iron Age Latvia, Apals and Mugurēvičs simply relied on analyses from the Soviet period, stating that society was stratified and could be divided into four social categories (see below). Economic

65 Vassar & Tarvel 1975: 29.

66 Šterns 1985.

67 Apals & Mugurēvičs 2001.

power, they believed, was based on the collection of taxes, calculated on the basis of ploughlands and work-horses, and arranged according to the division of administrative districts (*pagast's*). Of crucial importance for decision-making may have been popular assemblies, mentioned in written sources as *placidum* or *colloquium*, as well as meetings of *seniores*.⁶⁸

The Soviet era introduced the use of archaeological evidence in the interpretation of prehistoric social formations, or, more exactly, the archaeological facts were now widely used to demonstrate concepts based on historical criteria. However, the territory of present-day Latvia has not been archaeologically investigated with the same intensity (Figure 2.4.). Excavations have been conducted in the eastern part of the country more than in other regions, and this can be attributed predominantly to the fact that Latvians' national identity

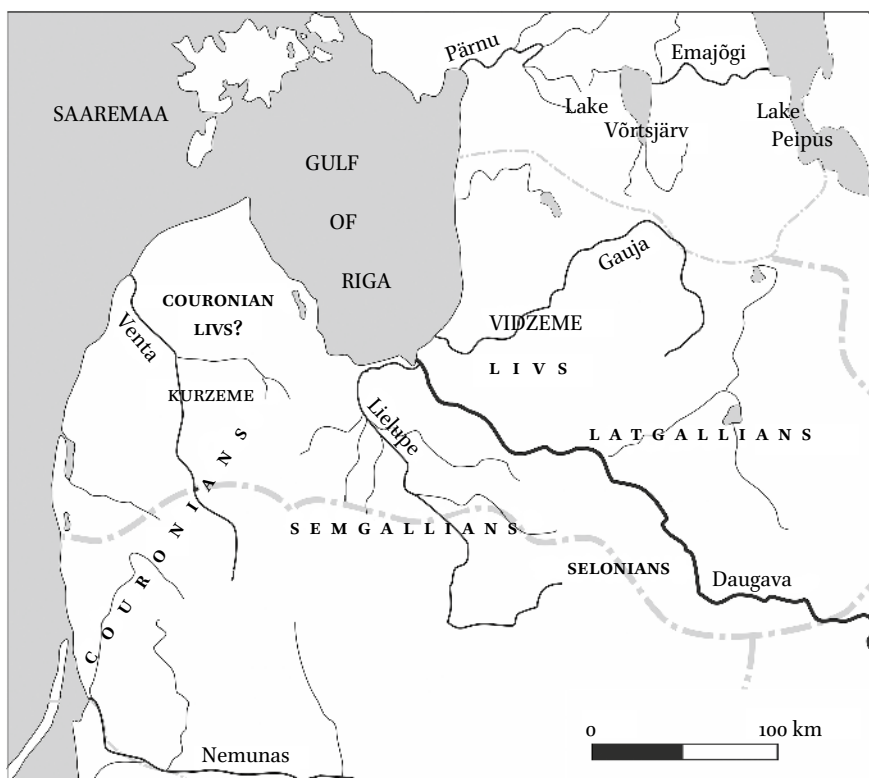


FIGURE 2.4 Map of present-day Latvia with late prehistoric ethnicities.

68 Apals & Mugurēvičs 2001.

is greatly based on the Latgallians, who inhabited these areas.⁶⁹ A number of cemeteries were also excavated in the lower reaches of the Daugava River, the area populated by the Livs, but most of these areas were flooded by the river in the 1970s, owing to the building of Daugava Power Station, and since then have not been available for further fieldwork. The number of excavations at Late Iron Age sites in the Latvian part of Couronia, Selonja and Semgallia is clearly more modest.

2.3.1 *Latgallian Society*

The Latgallians were characterised by large flat burial grounds with inhumations from the 7th century onwards, and mound cemeteries with similar inhumations starting from the end of the 10th century. Several hundred graves can often be found, especially in the first type of cemetery, and only a few do not contain at least some grave goods. About 80 Latgallian flat burial grounds with approximately 2000 inhumations were known prior to 1999, in addition to which must be counted 15 cemeteries with about 200 burial mounds.⁷⁰

Both male and female graves frequently contained abundant sets of jewellery, but the ornament types were normally strictly differentiated between men and women (Figures 2.5. and 2.6.). With one exception, weapons have been found only in male graves, and they belonged to ethnically specific types as well; weapons belonging to international or Scandinavian types were rare. The orientation of Latgallian inhumations was firmly fixed: head towards the east for a man, and the west for a woman. The percentage of male and female burials inside one cemetery was seldom balanced, the number of male burials normally clearly exceeding female ones; richly furnished female graves were also much less common than copiously furnished male burials.⁷¹ Against this background it is somewhat unexpected that the relationship between boys' and girls' skeletons in Latgallian cemeteries seems to be 50–50. Children altogether formed 10–20% of all graves.⁷²

Two of the Latgallian cemeteries were interpreted in the Soviet period and the results published as books. The first of them was Nukša, which was excavated as early as 1947–1948, and consisted of 207 inhumations and five cremations. The latter all belonged to women, according to the grave goods, and were therefore interpreted by the excavator, Elvira Šnore, as possible wives originating from some neighbouring Estonian district, where cremations

69 Vilcāne 2000.

70 Rādiņš 1999.

71 Šnore 1987; Apals & Apala 1994; Vilcāne 1996; Šnē 2002: 178–201.

72 Vilcāne 1996; Šnē 2002: 178–201, 451–453.



FIGURE 2.5 *Latgallian female bracelet from Kivti inhumation cemetery, 9th–10th centuries (LNM VI 14: 597). Semgallian and Selonian women used similar bracelets.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY R. KANIŅŠ. COURTESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LATVIA.

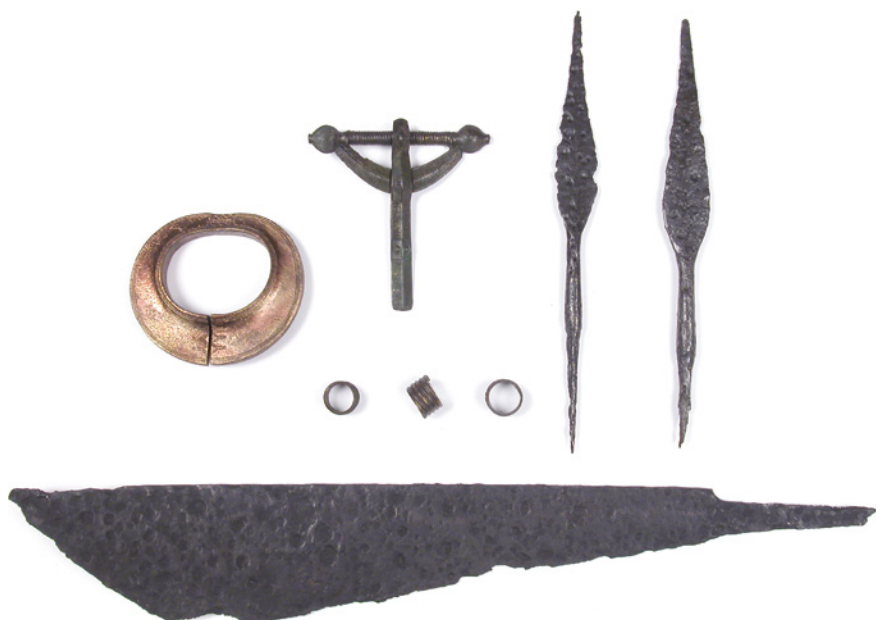


FIGURE 2.6 *Artefacts from a Latgallian male grave at Lejasbitēni inhumation cemetery, 9th–10th centuries (LNM A 11847: 418–424).*
PHOTOGRAPH BY R. KANIŅŠ. COURTESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LATVIA.

dominated.⁷³ The recorded graves were divided into four social groups according to the grave goods uncovered in them. The basic ideas for dividing these groups were however taken from Henry's *Chronicle of Livonia*. Abundantly equipped male burials, containing a two-edged sword, 1–2 spearheads, an axe with a handle wrapped with bronze ribbon, armbands, fibulae, finger-rings, decorated coats, and head-dresses were respectively attributed to the *seniores* and *meliores* mentioned by Henry, while other male burials with weapons but fewer ornaments were believed to have been their retainers or other sorts of noblemen. The largest group, represented in male burials with fewer ornaments, and only an axe or a spear as weapons, were interpreted by Šnore as free peasants. The last group, normally having only a single knife in their grave, were considered dependent people or slaves.⁷⁴

Approximately the same scheme was repeated in her published report of another Latgallian cemetery, Kivti, where 175 intact inhumation burials were unearthed mainly in the 1950s. Šnore divided burials into two time periods and concluded that the 9th–12th centuries was the time when social stratification deepened in society.⁷⁵

In the early 1990s, when the Service-*et-al* model was introduced into Latvian archaeology and replaced the long since out-of-date Marxist evolutionary schema, new terms and concepts were introduced into the interpretation of prehistoric society. In the 1990s, new approaches to late prehistoric Latgallian society were presented mainly by Arnis Radiņš. He suggested that as many as five social groups could be distinguished in some cemeteries other than Nukša; in Ludza Odukalns cemetery, for instance. The difference from the division into four suggested by Šnore was an added group of very poor burials, representing the lowest stratum in the society. The percentage of burials belonging to each group, starting from the highest, that is, the most abundantly equipped graves, was respectively 5% – 23% – 42% – 18% – 2%. The hierarchical structure of the society was, accordingly, rhomboid shaped, i.e. the percentage of people belonging to the highest as well as to the lowest strata was very small.⁷⁶

Based mainly on the analysis of artefacts in graves, and particularly of some selected status symbols, Radiņš presented a view that Latgallian society became more deeply stratified in the course of the 9th century, with a rank that can be considered chieftdom. It was a politically stable period characterised

73 Šnore & Zeids 1957.

74 Šnore & Zeids 1957.

75 Šnore 1987.

76 Radiņš 1994; 1999: 131–153.

by an increasing population, which was reflected archaeologically in new cemeteries brought into use. The period starting from the second half of the 10th century was shaped by persistent military conflicts with the Baltic Finns, caused by the Latgallians extending their habitation area, processes which continued until the German conquest in the early 13th century.

The transformation period in the late 10th century was, according to Rādiņš, marked by changes in the composition of find assemblages in graves: as an example, two-edged swords and horse harnesses in Latgallian graves, also rare in later times, never occurred in the period before the end of the 10th century. Starting from the second half of the 10th century scales and weights also began to be put into graves, which he interpreted as merchants taking power in Latgallian society. This new economic and political elite steered the process of social development from what Rādiņš calls military democracy to early state, which took place in the course of the 11th century and was influenced by the Orthodox church in Kiev-Rus. The princes of Jersika and Koknes were probably already converted to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and their burial grounds are neither known nor investigated archaeologically.

Rādiņš saw the economic basis for the prosperity of Latgallian society in the 11th–12th centuries in the slave trade along the river Daugava and used the absence of foreign ornaments in Latgallian female graves, together with the shortage of graves without grave goods, as an argument that the Latgallians did not keep slaves, but traded them on.⁷⁷

2.3.2 *The Livs*

The society of the prehistoric Livs has often been seen through the distorting lens of national bias, and most researchers have not been able to avoid projecting present-day or later historical circumstances back onto the 13th and even earlier centuries. Starting from the 20th century, this is primarily expressed by an approach that prefers to compare the Livic material with that of other ethnic groups in the territory of present-day Latvia, while cultural connections with the Estonian area have traditionally drawn much less attention. Instead, similarities with Scandinavian archaeological material are what most archaeologists have emphasised when treating the heritage of prehistoric Livs.

Livs, who gave their name to medieval Livonia, were in one way or another mentioned in a great number of early-13th-century written sources. The story

77 Rādiņš 1996; 1999: 131–153.

of their submission, as well as the beginning of the town of Riga in one of the best locations of the area that they occupied, is vividly described for us by Henry the Livonian. He distinguished between Daugava-Livs, Gauja-Livs, and Metsepole-Livs, and sometimes also the Livs in a district called *Idumea*, perhaps because they spoke different dialects, or were ethnically distinctive in some other way. In particular, late prehistoric burials in these areas really demonstrate a distinct identity when compared to surrounding regions, primarily the Latgallians who were the Livs' closest neighbours. In some areas, these two ethnic groups seem to have lived side by side.⁷⁸ The ethnic border between Estonians and Livs was not as long in geographical terms, owing to the fact that sandy areas in the south-western corner of present-day Estonia were, and still are, only thinly populated. The Livic material culture tends to have more in common with that on Saaremaa, their closest neighbour over the sea.⁷⁹

In archaeological literature, the inhabitants of the northern part of the Kurzeme peninsula are frequently labelled with the name "Livs", too, often still being called "Couronian Livs", in order to distinguish them from the "real" Livs. The main reason for such an assessment probably lies in the historical period: the Livs as they were known from ethnographic sources were people inhabiting the northern sandy coastal zone of the Kurzeme peninsula. By the 19th century, at the latest, the "real" Livs were almost totally assimilated into Latvians.⁸⁰

However, the term "Couronian Livs" can be misleading; at least its use has been disputed by several researchers. The chronicler Henry the Livonian, who was normally very precise in specifying ethnic differences, persistently used the name "Couronians" (*Curones*) for the inhabitants of the Kurzeme peninsula, without distinguishing between Baltic Finnic and ethnic Baltic populations or their languages, differences that were generally believed to have existed in the early 13th century.⁸¹ It is logical to assume that the chronicler treated the Livs and Couronians as separate ethnicities and considered the Couronians known to him to be ethnically homogeneous (see also 2.3.3.).⁸²

When the first Livic cemeteries were excavated in the Lower-Daugava area in the 19th century, they were, in the context of the contemporary paradigm,

78 Tõnisson 1974: 178–188; Apals & Apala 1994.

79 Mägi 2005b.

80 Tõnisson 1974: 188.

81 CHL.

82 Tõnisson 1970.



FIGURE 2.7 *Chain arrangement from Laukskola cemetery, female inhumation grave No 120 (LNVM VI 128: 785), the second half of the 10th or the 11th century. Here the typical Livic female ornaments were combined with probable Gotlandic influences. The grave No 120 contained, in addition to abundant other female jewellery, an axe and scissors.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY R. KANIŅŠ. COURTESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LATVIA.

interpreted as the burial grounds of Scandinavian colonists (Figure 2.7.). The conspicuous similarity between Scandinavian artefact types and grave goods recorded in these Livic graves provided researchers with convenient arguments, for the abundance of find assemblages did not fit with the vision of the local people as savages. Latvian nationalistic views in the 1930s continued

to picture the late prehistoric Livs as a poor, savage, and disorganised group among the more highly-developed Baltic tribes.⁸³

During the post-war period, most of Livic archaeological sites in the lower basin of the River Daugava were rescue-excavated in great haste in 1966–1975, initiated by the building of Riga Power Station. The river was thereafter impounded in connection with the power station, flooding most of these sites. In the Livic areas around the River Gauja, excavations have been conducted mostly at cemeteries and hill-forts, and to a much lesser extent at dwelling sites.⁸⁴ Many of these investigations, however, have not been published or published only in summary form.

Burial customs of the Daugava Livs and Gauja Livs possess some distinctive features, which perhaps can be explained by the topographic situation and presence of other ethnic groups in the cemeteries on the banks of the Daugava River (see also Section 3.4.3.).⁸⁵ The region of the Daugava Livs (in early written sources sometimes referred to as *Veinalenses*, probably from the Finnic name for Daugava – *Väina*) embraced the areas along the lower reaches of the Daugava River near the present town of Riga and east-southeast of it. By 1997 22 Livic cemeteries were known in this area, the earliest of them dated to the middle of the 10th century. Laukskola and three cemeteries on the island of Dole were singled out as the largest and most conspicuous of them (Figure 2.8.).⁸⁶ They were all situated in the close neighbourhood of the big Daugmale hill-fort, probably the predecessor of Riga, and can therefore be connected with this late Viking Age-early medieval trade centre on the Daugava River.

Cemeteries known in the lower reaches of the Daugava River were flat burial grounds or, to a lesser extent, consisted of sand mounds with single burials under them. The custom of inhuming the dead differentiated the Livs from the other Baltic Finns, and can possibly be considered an influence of their closest Baltic neighbours. Still, in Livic inhumation graves, the dead were oriented with their heads towards the north or northwest, both in male and female burials. This differentiates them from Semgallians and Latgallians, whose custom was to always bury men and women in opposite directions. Although inhumations prevailed, cremation burials were also widespread, under mounds or in burial pits in flat burial grounds. The composition of grave goods demonstrated wide international contacts, and the number of females probably from a non-Livic

83 Balodis 1936; for the attitudes in the 1930s see Šnē 1997.

84 Šnē 1997.

85 Māgi 2005b.

86 Zariņa 1988, 1997; A. Zariņa 2006; Šnore 1996.

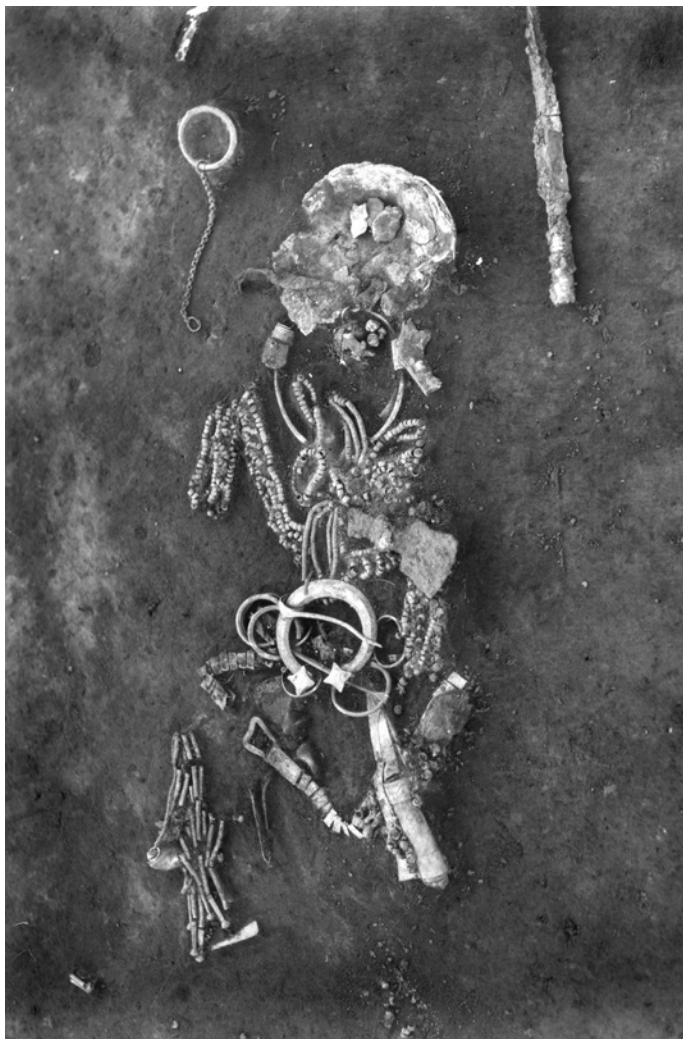


FIGURE 2.8 *Burial No 2 at Laukskola cemetery, a boy, 19th century.*
(Çinters 1936–37, LVNM excavation reports AA 257).

PHOTOGRAPH BY V. ÇINTERS. COURTESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM
OF LATVIA.

ethnic background was about one-third.⁸⁷ As for the number of grave goods, the Livic cemeteries were most abundant in Latvia, while burials without any artefacts very seldom occurred.

Both the burial customs and artefact material of the Gauja Livs (around present Turaida, Krimulda, and Sigulda) were relatively homogeneous compared

87 Spirģis 2008: 373–375.

The fact that Livic graves cannot be dated earlier than the middle of the 10th century in their proper habitation area has raised questions about their origin. The discussion has got wind in its sails from a reference by Henry the Livonian to people called *Venden* in Couronia, who in the undefined past had moved from there to the area of later Riga, and from there further on to Vidzeme, where their castle was called Wenden (Latvian *Cēsis*).⁸⁹ The general tendency seems to be that Latvian archaeologists support the theory that the Livs immigrated to the lower reaches of the Daugava basin from northern Kurzeme, where uninterrupted development of Finnic culture can be observed throughout the first millennium AD. In the following hundred years, the Livs were then believed to have widened their area of occupation to the region around the River Gauja where the earliest graves appear in the 11th century.⁹⁰ Baltic-German, Russian, and Estonian archaeologists tend to prefer the theory of autochthonous development.⁹¹

Indeed, the general argument that the archaeological culture in the Lower-Daugava area before the 10th century was Semgallian does not sound completely persuasive to Estonian archaeologists. The archaeological evidence from the centuries before the 10th century is scarce, and the few sites and finds from this period in the Lower-Daugava area resemble not only those in Semgallia but also those on Saaremaa. The finds under question have, nevertheless, not actually been published.⁹² On the other hand, the non-appearance of graves with artefacts before the middle of the 10th century can also be considered the most obvious characteristic linking the burial rites of the Livs with those of Saaremaa and Estonia in general – this phenomenon characterised the whole of Estonia, and was probably caused by changes in burial culture or mythological thinking (see also 2.2.2., 6.2.6., and 6.3.4.). Not only the first half of the Viking Age but also centuries preceding this period lack cemeteries or are represented only by single burials; only a small number of secondary burials into earlier, mainly Roman period stone graves are known.⁹³

The migration theory also leaves open other questions, for instance why was one of the best areas in the territory of present-day Latvia scarcely inhabited during a period when the core area of the Semgallians demonstrated abundant archaeological material, especially in the form of large cemeteries? Some

89 CHL X: 14.

90 Šturms 1936: 36–37; Mugurevičs 1970; Šnore 1996; Spirģis 2008.

91 Moora 1952; Tõnisson 1974; about the development of the ideas see Ciglis *et al.* 2001: 6–10; Spirģis 2008: 495.

92 For some publications see e.g. Ciglis 2004.

93 Jaanits *et al.* 1982; Selirand 1974; Mägi 2002, 2005b.

archaeologists have therefore tried to find a kind of compromise, claiming that the Livs in the southern part of Vidzeme developed from the local Finnic population, but that there was at the same time also a small-scale immigration from northern Kurzeme.⁹⁴ However, evidence of graves dated to before the second half of the 10th century in northern Kurzeme is very limited, too.

Biological anthropologists have, like archaeologists, also suggested opposing theories about the origin of the Livs. Raisa Denisova, for example, makes a case for continuity from the Bronze Age,⁹⁵ while Rita Grävere has suggested, based on odontological material in the cemeteries in the lower reaches of the Daugava River, that the people buried there represented various ethnic backgrounds.⁹⁶ She put forward a hypothesis that the Livs developed from Scandinavians settling in the Lower Daugava area in the 10th century, and merging with Finno-Ugric groups arriving there in the 11th century from the north-western part of present-day Russia.

The Gauja Livs especially, but also Livs in other areas, were the main subject of Estonian archaeologist Evald Tõnisson, resulting in a monograph published in German in 1974.⁹⁷ In agreement with the general tendencies at the time, however, he paid more attention to the Livs' subsistence sources, economy, and agriculture, than their social structure – probably since the latter was prescribed by the ruling Marxist framework. He believed that burials with luxurious weaponry (e.g. pattern-welded swords and spears, decorated with silver inlay and Scandinavian-style animal patterns, as well as axes with a decoration of silver wire) represented the highest social class, the elders or *seniores*. Some of these elders possessed a fort and ruled over a group of military retainers, for instance Dabrel, who was mentioned in early-13th-century written sources as the head of *Satesele* district. Social relations between *seniores* and commoners appeared, according to Tõnisson, still unclear, but he suggested a certain subservience, even a feudal relationship, especially in cases when some villages were connected with certain personal names in written sources. How far back in time such forms of dependency, referred to in the 13th-century sources, might extend, was not of particular interest to Tõnisson.

Tõnisson could also see, based on the burial customs, that there existed a stratum of military retainers, who were in one way or another dependent on the *seniores*. Such people occurred mainly in the Daugava area and among the southern part of the Gauja Livs, where weapon graves were more common,

94 Mugurevičs 1970; Tõnisson 1974: 178–188; Zariņa 2006.

95 Denisova 1982.

96 Grävere 1994.

97 1974.

while the percentage of free peasants was higher in peripheral areas. Tõnisson believed that slaves also formed a considerable part of society, supporting the economy in upper class estates.⁹⁸

A new attempt to use Liv burials to define their social system was made by Andris Šnē in the mid-1990s. He suggested that female graves could be divided into five and male graves into four categories, according to how many pieces of jewellery had been laid in the grave.⁹⁹ However, the somewhat surprising result was that for women the most abundant variant was also by far the most common one – which could indicate some kind of symbolism other than wealth or social status behind the jewellery assemblage. Šnē nevertheless contented himself with the explanation that the average level of income in Livic society was high and that the large highest social stratum had close connections with trade, as indicated by numerous foreign artefacts. Burials with scales and/or weights were interpreted as those of merchants, despite the fact that these items often occurred in boys' graves.¹⁰⁰

Many decades after the actual fieldwork, Anna Zariņa published the results of excavations on the largest Daugava Livic cemetery – Laukskola – in a monograph written in Latvian.¹⁰¹ The cemetery with a total of 610 burials, directly opposite the Daugmale hill-fort on the other side of the Daugava River, was the largest of the Livic cemeteries, and demonstrated a series of peculiarities compared with several other cemeteries of the same time (for more detail, see Section 7.4.3.). Zariņa's model of Livic social structure, derived from the excavation results, was based on the assumption that the population buried there had represented an ordinary agrarian village. The Daugmale centre on the opposite bank of the river could, however, have been the main reason why several colonists from Scandinavia and, as she believes, the lower Venta River basin in Couronia, ended up in this area, lived in the hill-fort, and were sometimes buried in the Laukskola cemetery.¹⁰²

One of the latest books dedicated to the Livs is that of Roberts Spirģis, published in Latvian. He took into consideration Livic tortoise (or oval) brooches, a local jewellery form inspired by similar ones in Scandinavia and further developed locally. His interests were however much broader than just one artefact type, and he put forward several, sometimes quite wide-ranging theories based predominantly on the chronology of brooches and chain arrangements.

98 Tõnisson 1974: 172–174.

99 Šnē 1997.

100 Šnē 1997.

101 A. Zariņa 2006.

102 A. Zariņa 2006: 424–427.

He assumed, for instance, that the typology of tortoise brooches supported the theory of Livic migration from Northern Kurzeme, where the earliest versions of the brooches have been found, to the Lower-Daugava area in the mid-10th century. Elaborating further, he suggested that a certain element on local tortoise brooches indicated that these migrants were originally of Scandinavian origin, who had already been mixed in Kurzeme with local Finnic (that is, Couronian Livic) and Baltic inhabitants. Openwork chain-holders that appeared in the Daugava Livic graves around 1000 AD proved, he believed, immigration from the northern part of the Finnish Gulf, where similar ornaments have also been found. He concluded, in full agreement with the school of migrations, that the development of chain ornaments revealed the Livs' origin as a people consisting of several ethnic components.¹⁰³

2.3.3 *Couronia – The Land of Different Ethnicities*

There exist different understandings of exactly which region can be called Couronia. "Couronia" means different things to different people. For Lithuanian archaeologists it often means coastal areas in the western part of their country, as well as the southern part of the Latvian western coast, leaving the northern part of the Kurzeme peninsula outside this term. Kurzeme however means literally Cour-Land (where *zeme* in Latvian represents "land"), and so the whole peninsula is counted under the name Couronia both in Latvia and in Estonia. The same is true for Estonian *Kuramaa* (or Finnish *Kuurinmaa*), where *maa* means "land". The inhabitants of this land were, at least historically and in folklore, called *kuralased* (Finnish *kuurilaiset*), meaning by this term the ethnically Finnic population on the peninsula of Kurzeme.¹⁰⁴ More commonly, the ethnic background of *kuralased* was often left unspecified, thus assuming that this name also applied to the Couronians mentioned in Viking Age and early medieval written sources. Latvians and Lithuanians, however, prefer to define the Couronians as only the Baltic-speaking people, while the term Couronian Livs has been reserved for the Finnic-speaking population of this area (see also 2.3.2.).

In our own time, the ethnic composition of the Couronian population in prehistory and the early medieval period is a matter of discussion strongly biased by nationality, relying predominantly on interpretations of burial rites and artefacts. Earlier researchers, up to the establishment of the independent Latvian state, almost unanimously considered the historical Couronians to have been a Finnic-speaking people, while some, relying on the contemporary

103 Spirgis 2008: 381–384, 496–497.

104 One of the later and most extreme examples, Saks 1960.

linguistic situation in this area, started to claim as early as the 19th century that they must have spoken a language similar to Lithuanian, Latvian, or Prussian.¹⁰⁵

In the late 1930s Paul Johansen put forward a theory that the Livs arrived in Kurzeme only around 1000. He claimed, without any convincing proof, that the Livic newcomers somehow formed a ruling class among the Baltic inhabitants, and that it is mainly they whose military activity was mentioned in historical documents. According to the personal names in written sources, even in central Couronia the Finnic proportion of the population was still 25–30% as late as in the 16th century.¹⁰⁶

Decades later Tõnisson contributed to the discussion by demonstrating convincingly the discontinuity between the prehistoric Finnic inhabitants on Couronia, and the Livs who moved to the northern coasts of the Kurzeme peninsula in the Middle Ages. According to both archaeological and historical sources, the coastal zone of northern Kurzeme was properly settled only as late as the 14th century, since it is quite unsuitable for agriculture. A more or less complete ethnic group of (Coastal) Livs first took shape there in the 17th century. Tõnisson believed that this people were re-settlers from the ancient Livic area, who assimilated a certain number of Latvians and were finally – in the 20th century – assimilated themselves. Considering the situation in the Late Iron Age, it would therefore be more accurate to talk of the Livs only in Vidzeme, and of another Baltic Finnic group in northern Couronia.¹⁰⁷

Some linguists have demonstrated a Baltic Finnic component in place names along the Couronian coast even as far south as the territory of present-day Lithuania, as well as in the basins of the main rivers in Couronia.¹⁰⁸ Using linguistic source material, V. Kiparsky tried to show, in accordance with Johansen's ideas, that these toponyms could be the heritage of the Livs, who arrived to Kurzeme by sea around 1000. He believed they most likely originated from Karelia, because linguistically they tended to have features similar to the Vepsa language.¹⁰⁹ The same ideas, only with the addition that the Finnic newcomers in Couronia were allied with Scandinavians, and had a certain

105 Asaris *et al.* 2008: 27–37.

106 Johansen 1939: 271–282, ill. 168; Petrenko & Urtāns 1995: 17.

107 Tõnisson 1970.

108 It should be mentioned here that, for native Baltic Finnic speakers, several, by now strongly Balticised place names along the Latvian and Lithuanian coast have clear meanings even in our days, let alone the names as they appear in historical documents.

109 Kiparsky 1939.

Scandinavian element in their origin, were also supported by another linguist, J. Ozols.¹¹⁰

Ideas of Viking Age Finnic immigration to Couronia are generally, and with good reasons, no longer supported. Alas, no convincing alternative explanation has been presented for interpreting the existence of Finnic place names or a considerable Finnic population in modern period Couronia either, if we are not to assume a prehistoric or early medieval Finnic-speaking population in these areas.¹¹¹

Estonian archaeologist Harri Moora stated in the 1930s, relying on archaeological evidence in Couronia and neighbouring areas, that Roman period burial forms in the area of present-day western Lithuania belonged together with the Prussian areas culturally. He suggested, therefore, that the inhabitants of the region under question were the aboriginal population of this area, the ancestors of Baltic Couronians, who since then gradually extended the area that they occupied northward. They, he stated, were the Couronians who were later mentioned in written sources.¹¹² Moora's opinion has remained a cornerstone for the ethnic problem of Couronia up to our own day, most discussions turning on the exact date and reach of the Couronian migration towards the North. Some burial types on the Estonian island of Saaremaa, as well as artefacts unearthed in them, have however indicated, as early as the 1970s, the conspicuous similarity between the material culture in Couronia and coastal Estonia, especially the island of Saaremaa, throughout the whole Iron Age.¹¹³ The new evidence has nevertheless not succeeded in changing general ideas about ethnic origins in Couronia.¹¹⁴

In the early-13th-century Henry's *Chronicle of Livonia*, a district called Couronia (*Curonia*) appeared as a single unit. Other documents of the 13th century however sometimes refer to possible divisions. In treaties concluded between the Couronians and the German conquerors in 1230 and 1231, for instance, nine districts were mentioned under the common name *Vredeturonia* (Peaceful Couronia), perhaps referring to the fact that those Couronians were not involved in conflict with the Crusaders. *Vredeturonia* embraced, according to the place names mentioned, the central part of the Kurzeme peninsula west of Riga – a region which, in the Late Iron Age, was predominantly characterised by archaeological evidence defined as belonging to the Couronian Livs.

110 1971.

111 See also Petrenko & Urtāns 1995: 17.

112 Moora 1938: 656–670.

113 Mägi 2002, 2005a, 2006.

114 For an opposing view, see e.g. Vasks 2008.

The western part of Kurzeme peninsula, with its administrative districts called *kiligunda* (as in *Vredecurlonia*, on Saaremaa, or in Estonia in general), was also mentioned in early-13th-century treaties.¹¹⁵ This region embraced the lower and middle reaches of the River Venta and neighbouring areas east of them. It was an area where the archaeological material before the 11th century, at the latest, was defined as Baltic Finnic by Latvian archaeologists. Even after that, during the 11th–14th centuries, inhabitants of this region have sometimes been referred to as “Couronianised Livs”.¹¹⁶ It might be worth mentioning that *Vredecurlonia* as well as the western part of the peninsula coincide with the Tami dialect area, which is characterised by strong influences from Baltic Finnic languages.¹¹⁷

Archaeologically the northern part of Couronia is poorly investigated, and only a fraction of the results are published.¹¹⁸ Inhumations as well as cremations under low sand mounds, in stone graves, or in flat burial grounds were common, and in Lake Vilkumuiža at Talsi even burials in bodies of water were recorded.¹¹⁹ Differences in burial customs have frequently been directly associated with different ethnic groups, using archaeological data from other territories of present-day Latvia for comparison. Thus, the local inhumations tended to be associated with a Finnic population with the argument that inhumation burials were widespread among the Livs. Similarly, cremations were linked with the (Baltic) Couronians moving northward from southern Couronia, without reference to neighbouring Estonian (especially Saaremaa) areas, where cremation was prevalent until the beginning of the 13th century.¹²⁰ Artefacts in these cremation graves demonstrate great similarity between the Couronian and Saaremaa material, often literally belonging to the same morphological types.¹²¹

Because of the scarcity of finds in the northern half of Couronia, or perhaps more precisely because the Couronian Finns are considered a part of the Livs, and not the Couronians mentioned in written sources, the interpretation of Couronian society is based on comparatively abundant evidence of the inhabitants in the southern half of this region. The general attitude to ancient Couronians has been and still is strongly influenced by national romantic

115 Auns 2001.

116 Mugurevičs 1972; Vasks 2008.

117 Mugurevičs 1972.

118 E.g. Kiwull 1911; Šturms 1936; Mugurevičs 1970.

119 Apals *et al.* 1974: 187.

120 Mugurevičs 1970; Asaris 1996.

121 Mägi 2002: 125–137.

approaches. They are regularly called “Baltic Vikings”, and their bellicose side has potentially been over-represented in the treatment of their society.¹²²

At the Late Iron Age sites, excavations of cemeteries, hill-forts, and settlements have been conducted in both the Latvian and Lithuanian parts of Couronia.¹²³ Lithuanian archaeologists have been somewhat more active in this field during the last two decades, and they have also been the ones writing the most recent overviews of the Couronian social structure.

The most common burial places in the Late Iron Age area of the Baltic Couronians were flat burial grounds, where the spread of the cremation practice from south to north could be considered to have been a clear tendency during the 9th–11th centuries. These individual burials frequently contained a great number of weapons, riding equipment, and ornaments, the latter in both male and female graves (Figures 2.10. and 2.11.).¹²⁴ In the inhumation graves, as they still prevailed in the 9th century, burials in opposite directions according to sex, which were common in Semgallian and especially Latgallian cemeteries,



FIGURE 2.10 *Male burial No 226 at Laiviai cemetery in Lithuanian Couronia, the 10th century (Griciuvienė 2009: 203).*

COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF LITHUANIA.

122 Žulkus 2000, 2011; Karlina 2006; Asaris *et al.* 2008: 129–137; Bliujienė 2008; for a somewhat critical point of view see e.g. Šnė 2008.

123 Apals *et al.* 2008: 9–21.

124 Stankus 1995; Žulkus 1991: 11; 2000; Bliujienė 1999, 2008.



FIGURE 2.11 *Male burial No 361 at Laiviai cemetery in Lithuanian Couronia, the 11th century (Griciuvienė 2009: 258).*

COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF LITHUANIA.

occurred sporadically, although it was more common to bury all the dead inside one cemetery in the same direction.¹²⁵

Exceptionally for the ethnic Baltic cultural sphere, there were also collective graves in use with mixed remains of the dead, cremations in large burial pits that have been recorded appearing in Couronia south of the Venta River in the 10th century.¹²⁶ The majority of cremations in Couronia, dated from the 11th century upwards, have however been found in small grave pits, only one burial in each, which resemble those in central Lithuania. In some cases burials were found in the top layers of the large collective grave pits, indicating their later date.¹²⁷

The introduction of cremations has been seen by several scholars as indicating some cultural impact, either from Scandinavia, or from the Prussian area.¹²⁸ This view has been expressed by Lithuanian archaeologist Vladas

¹²⁵ Kulikauskas *et al.* 1961: 380–381; Vaitkunskienė 1979.

¹²⁶ Balodis 1940.

¹²⁷ Kulikauskas *et al.* 1961: 387–388.

¹²⁸ Asaris *et al.* 2008: 57.

Žulkus, who has associated this phenomenon with social changes in Couronian society. Since 9th–11th-century cremations in several west Lithuanian cemeteries contain more artefacts, especially weapons, in comparison with inhumation graves, he attributed these burials to the wealthier section of society. These, he believed, were members of military retinues, who became politically influential in Couronian society as early as the 8th–9th centuries. Similar processes happened earlier and more rapidly in Prussian society, where they could also be associated with the spread of the practice of cremation, while the earliest cremations in the south Couronian area could be dated only to the late 8th century.¹²⁹

Another Couronian expert, Lithuanian archaeologist Audronė Bliujienė has pointed to the sudden increase of weapon graves, especially these with luxury items, in 7th-century southern Couronia. She explains it as the further stratification of society according to military ideals. This change might have been modelled on Scandinavian society, she believes, at the same time admitting herself that the amount of Scandinavian imports in Couronia is small.¹³⁰

A number of archaeologists and historians believe that by the 12th century there had developed state-like formations in Couronia, even though no further consolidation of power could be traced. These early states are believed to have existed already in the 9th century when five “lands” were mentioned in Couronia by Rimbert the hagiographer. However, as tends to be characteristic of ethnic paradigms concerning Couronia, these five early states are normally believed to have indicated only the areas of the “real” Couronians, that is, the southern part of the region.¹³¹

The social structure of the Couronians, as it is envisioned by most Latvian and Lithuanian archaeologists, follows the same lines as that for the other Baltic people before the formation of the state. The supreme stratum consisted of rulers, whose power might, at least partly, have been heritable. They were followed in the social hierarchy by *seniores* or noblemen; the wealthy people; the free peasants; and dependent people. Some of the leaders could have quite large areas under their rule, for instance a ruler in *Vredecuronia*, Lammekin, who in 1230 was referred to as *Lammekinus rex* in chronicles.

The elders or *seniores* were differentiated in terms of rank, but they were however the ones establishing short-term and long-term alliances, in order to repel an enemy attack or mount a joint raid against some neighbours. The most important decisions were taken in assemblies of the political and

129 Žulkus 2000.

130 Bliujienė 2006.

131 Asaris *et al.* 2008: 139; Žulkus 2011.

economic leaders of a district, which meant that the elders had to reckon with other strata in society, even the free peasants. The latter had to pay taxes, take part in building fortifications, and do military service in times of conflict and raiding. The elders had their military retinues of professional warriors, who also performed some administrative duties, collected and divided produce, controlled trade, and guarded the borders. The stratum of dependent people was small, because they were not, according to the archaeologists' estimation, economically needed. They could have their own property, but it was more advantageous to sell them into slavery.¹³²

The written sources of the 13th century make a distinction between the northern and southern part of Couronia according to what the main administrative units were called: *kiligunda* and *Borchsoking* respectively. The first is considered to be a Baltic Finnic term, the other Scandinavian. It is believed that these were castle districts, comprising farmsteads, a village, or several villages, with a centre in a castle or hill-fort. Several of these castle districts formed so-called "lands" or early states – e.g. Pilsāts, which consisted of five or six hill-forts and the districts around them. The most central of the latter was Klaipēda, with the hill-fort of Kalnišķiai at the lower reaches of the Dangė River. Other Couronian lands were presumed to be similarly organised.¹³³

2.3.4 *Military Societies in Late Prehistoric Latvia*

During the last decade, the main theoretical approach to Latvian prehistoric society has been presented by Andris Šnē. He started his study as early as the 1990s, writing about the social systems of the Livs (for more details, see Section 2.2.2.). In the 2000s he expanded his research area to the Latgallians, preferring to consider the Latgallians and the Livs together under the heading of eastern Latvia (although the latter actually inhabited central Latvia).¹³⁴ This approach, however, can be debated on several points, as will be demonstrated below.

Šnē has extensively criticised the idea that the emergence of feudal relations and early state formation in the territory of present-day Latvia had already occurred before the conquest in the 13th century, an idea that is still supported by several other archaeologists and historians. The predominant contemporary view that states or state-like formations existed before the Crusades at least in Latgallia and Couronia is, in Šnē's opinion, directly adopted from the previous tradition of national archaeology that existed before World War II, and was, at

¹³² Asaris *et al.* 2008: 139–141.

¹³³ Asaris *et al.* 2008: 140–142.

¹³⁴ Šnē 2002, 2005.

least partially, maintained throughout the Marxist framework that characterised Latvian archaeology during the Soviet years.¹³⁵

Šnē plays with the terms “chiefdom” and “early state”, and he believes that Latvian Late Iron Age societies fluctuated continually between these two forms of social development. Chiefdom, which in itself is a very broad concept, was understood and defined by Šnē as quite a lightly stratified hierarchical structure, with power relations that resemble authority rather than political power. Chieftains were in this society only *primus inter pares*, who could achieve a higher social and political position in the community through particular personal skills. The commoners had the option of not following their rules and demands. Šnē believes that this incompleteness was caused by the lack of an ideology to support the military and economic power that these chieftains seemed nevertheless to have possessed. From time to time there were attempts by particular individuals to seize more power, which were however all suppressed by the rest of society. The social organisation in pre-Crusade Latvia could therefore not be considered feudal, let alone defining some formations within it as “states”. It was instead a quite egalitarian, or, as he calls it, “militarized society”.¹³⁶

Šnē uses almost entirely archaeological evidence to prove his vision of Latvian society. He claims that settlement patterns expressed egalitarianism, as well as did burial customs, where nearly all the dead were equipped with at least some artefacts as grave goods. However, his interpretation raises some unavoidable questions. Firstly, he has chosen to treat the Latgallian and Livic evidence together, claiming that ethnicity did not play any crucial role in late prehistoric society, where clan or family status was decisive. It remains however only a declaration, without any explanation of why ethnic affiliation was then expressed so clearly in burial customs. Latgallians and Livs had remarkably distinctive artefact types put into graves, and their burial customs encompassed several different features as well. Cemeteries in these two cultural areas hint at different gender systems, and find assemblages in Livic graves reflect a close international network, while Latgallian material culture bears strongly distinctive individual features, to mention only some of the most striking characteristics in the comparison of these two ethnic groups. Considering Livic and Latgallian evidence together in the argument, however, allows the use of only those characteristics that fit the theory. Nevertheless, this attitude generalises the interpretation so broadly that several details significant to one or another culture area just disappear.

135 Šnē 2002, 2005.

136 Šnē 2005; 2002: 465–466.

Settlements and hill-forts, and not only burials, play a big role in Šnē's theories, which is quite unusual in Latvian archaeology where no large-scale discussion seems to exist about settlement patterns or related issues. Šnē points to the fact that buildings found in hill-forts or open settlements tend to all be of the same size, varying from 15–22 m² in area, and interprets this to mean that the construction of social space reflects a relatively egalitarian society.¹³⁷ However, he states himself that dwelling sites in Latvia have been difficult to study because of the building technique (horizontal log constructions), and because the structures are often not preserved owing to later activities. What he doesn't take into consideration sufficiently is the character of the sites excavated – buildings have normally been uncovered in hill-forts or open settlements near the Daugmale complex, on the banks of the Daugava River. The location of the latter possibly indicates a type of settlement different from an ordinary agrarian village; first of all, they can be assumed to be trading places, or at least villages whose populations increased considerably during trading seasons. Some of the buildings at such sites, as well as on hill-forts, were probably only used temporarily. Thus they might often have appeared to express an egalitarian structure, while social differences were actually demonstrated in more permanent dwellings.

Hill-forts are traditionally considered centres in Latvian archaeology, both military and political. Šnē emphasises the multifunctional role these constructions could have played in late prehistoric society, from symbol of prosperity and military defence to ritual places or even sites for military training. He also points out that the constructions in these fortifications were strengthened during the later centuries of prehistory, and chieftains could probably have participated actively in these processes. His conclusion is, however, that the hill-forts just form part of the egalitarian settlement pattern in Late Iron Age Latvia.¹³⁸

As for the military structure of the society, Šnē emphasises that this seems to be more valid for the Couronians and the Livs than, for instance, the Latgalians. This assessment is based on burial analysis, primarily on the amount of weapons in graves. He concludes that late prehistoric societies in Latvia were strongly militarised, and characterises this situation as follows: the leaders of society were also the commanders-in-chief of military forces, more or less all civilian men were warriors, and there was a military element in the education of the youth. Military values and heroes, but also weapons as symbols, were glorified, and warfare organised by the ruling strata principally meant obtaining

137 Šnē 2005: 62.

138 Šnē 2001, 2005.

economic advantage.¹³⁹ The estimation that, at least in parts of present-day Latvia, weapons were literally put in the graves of all males, is based on the presumption that excavated cemeteries represent the whole population. This conception has nevertheless been recently disputed in Estonian and Finnish archaeology (see topics 2.1. and 2.2.)

It can be concluded that the picture of archaeological evidence, as it is presented in Šnē's writings, doesn't differ dramatically from that in, for instance, north-west Russia at the same time. He has interpreted the material, however, as indicating a comparatively egalitarian society. There is no archaeological evidence, he states, that any centralisation of power towards state organisation occurred in the present territory of Latvia at the end of prehistory. The general situation and circumstances did not favour the ambitions of any particular agent to acquire power and authority. Society itself was not ready to break with traditional relations based on the ideology of collective egalitarianism.¹⁴⁰

2.3.5 *Central Baltic Lands – Semgallia, Žemaitia, and Selonia*

The historical territories of Semgallia and Selonia comprised the southern part of present Latvia and the northern part of present Lithuania. In archaeological terms, Semgallia is often considered together with neighbouring Žemaitia,¹⁴¹ which remained entirely within the area of present-day Lithuania. Žemaitia was theoretically also next to Couronia, but in reality separated from it by a 40-km-wide uninhabited zone.¹⁴²

Archaeological evidence in Semgallia and Žemaitia is similar in many aspects, although differences can also be traced; these are, nevertheless, not crucial from the point of view of the subject here. Selonia was culturally similar to these areas as well, except that the dead were inhumed under large collective mounds (Figure 2.12.). As the area largely bordered Latgallia, a number of similarities with this district, especially in artefact material, can also be noted. The evidence of Selonia, however, has been investigated somewhat more thoroughly only during the last decade,¹⁴³ and very little has been published in particular about late prehistoric society there.¹⁴⁴

Late Iron Age burial customs in Semgallia and Žemaitia were characterised by flat burial grounds with several hundred inhumations, laid out in fairly

139 Šnē 2007.

140 Šnē 2005.

141 In English also Samogitia.

142 Kuncevičius 2000b: 36.

143 Melne 2006.

144 E.g. Simniškytė 2006.



FIGURE 2.12 *Artefacts from a female inhumation burial at Lejasdopeles cemetery in Selonia, 11th–12th century (LVNM VI 56: 201–202). Similar female jewellery also characterised Latgallians.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY R. KANIŅŠ. COURTESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LATVIA.

regular rows (Figure 2.13.). The best example of such cemeteries on the Latvian side is Čunkāni Dreņģeri on the banks of the Nemunas River, where 697 graves were uncovered, laid out in rows on the terraces of the riverbanks, and dated to the 8th–11th centuries.

Male and female graves occurred together in central Baltic cemeteries without any spatial differences, but the graves of different sexes always faced opposite directions.¹⁴⁵ Starting from the 12th century the custom of cremation spread into Sēmgallia, a phenomenon that has been interpreted as the reflection of the expansion of the Lithuanians into this area, or attributed to resistance against Christianity.¹⁴⁶

The artefact material in graves was comparatively homogeneous, sometimes consisting of abundant grave goods, while graves without artefacts have also been recorded. In most cases, grave goods followed strict gender-specification. Artefact material in cemeteries as in other archaeological sites demonstrated ethnic peculiarities, but in Sēmgallia some common features

145 Kulikauskas *et al.* 1961: 383; Atgāzis 1992; Vaškevičiūtė 1992.

146 Zabiela 1998; Kuncevičius 2000b; Vasiliauskas 2001.

article on the changes in the Zhemaitian 5th–6th-century cemetery at Pagrybis, where she pointed out the sudden militarisation of the social system during this period. She linked this phenomenon with increasing male dominance and social hierarchisation in the society.¹⁵⁰

The general interpretation of late prehistoric society in Semgallia is apparently based mainly on written sources, which seem to indicate a deeply stratified system in its pre-state phase. Written sources mention seven lands inhabited by Semgallians in the early 13th century, all with prominent hill-forts functioning as political centres. The most important, according to the written documents, are the hill-forts of Mežotne, Tērvete, and Dobeles, which have been thoroughly excavated. Several centres were marked by two hill-forts, of which one functioned as a cult site.¹⁵¹ Still, not all hill-forts or their complexes were district centres – the total number of Iron Age hill-forts in Semgallia is about 30, the great majority of them in the territory of present-day Latvia. At the end of prehistory many of these hill-forts had settlements at their foot, with an area covering 2–10 ha.¹⁵²

Lithuanian archaeologist Romas Jarockis has studied settlement history in Semgallia. He supports the view that a settlement was as a rule marked only by one cemetery, and cemeteries can therefore be used as indicators of habitation in a situation when only very few settlements have been excavated or even found. The settlement pattern in Late Iron Age Semgallia was, according to Jarockis, comparatively even, with villages located along the Lielupe River and its many tributaries. The majority of hill-forts were laid out on the edges of the central settlement regions, where their exact location was predominantly defined by landscape conditions.¹⁵³

The settlement pattern thus seems to have been moderately hierarchical, supporting the general vision of Semgallian Late Iron Age society as stratified but without consolidating power. However, some historians have suggested that the Semgallian princes Vestartus and Nameise mentioned in the 13th-century chronicles could indicate an already centralised power. They were connected with the large and powerful hill-forts Tērvete and Mežotne respectively, and Nameise seems to have succeeded Vestartus in his position ruling over more or less all the Semgallian lands.¹⁵⁴

150 Vaitkuskienė 1995.

151 Urtāns 2001.

152 Jarockis 1998.

153 Jarockis 2009.

154 Nikžentaitis 2001.

2.3.6 *The Rest of Inland Lithuania*

A deeply stratified society that became especially conspicuous from the 5th–6th centuries is demonstrated by princely graves under large burial mounds, which appeared in southern and eastern Lithuania.¹⁵⁵ The same region, more specifically the area between the Nemunas and Neris Rivers, was also the core area where the Lithuanian state started to take shape in the 11th century.¹⁵⁶

At the beginning of the Viking Age, a new type of hill-fort, called miniature hill-forts, made its appearance in Lithuanian lands. Their area of only 60–300 m², as well as up-to-5-metre-high ramparts, seem to indicate small private wooden castles belonging to a military elite. At the foot of such castles were 1–3 ha large open settlements. The pre-state period Lithuanian settlement pattern in general is believed to have consisted mainly of open villages.¹⁵⁷ The 12th and 13th centuries saw the appearance of very large and sometimes multiple hill-forts with open settlements of similar scale. Such hill-forts were political centres, sometimes already mentioned in written sources, which thus indicated the further stratification of society. The appearance of large political centres was contemporary with the growing homogenisation of material cultures in different areas in the territory of present-day Lithuania.¹⁵⁸

9th–12th-century burial customs in central, southern, and eastern parts of present-day Lithuania consisted of individual cremations, in the eastern part of the country mainly under mounds. Artefactual culture in these areas in general was quite distinctive, with only infrequent influences or imports from other areas. There are horse sacrifices or even separate horse burials, which may indicate the emergence of a warrior elite, but the few graves with really princely equipment tend to belong to the periods before the Viking Age.¹⁵⁹ Artefacts in these cremation graves, which normally form large cemeteries, are quite homogeneous and not especially abundant, without clear indications of deep social differentiation.¹⁶⁰

Still, as is known from written sources, by the early 13th century Lithuanian princes had started to play a significant role at the top of the now deeply stratified society. They were military commanders and peace-time rulers, possessed

155 Kuncėvičius 2000b.

156 Kuncėvičius 2000a.

157 Kuncėvičius 2000b.

158 Kuncėvičius 2000a.

159 Kulikauskas *et al.* 1961: 392; Bliujienė 1992; Bertašius 2009; Kurila 2009.

160 See e.g. Bertašius 2005.

large estates and had accumulated considerable wealth. Written sources of the 13th century connect several of them with powerful centres and mention their large military forces. Historians have calculated that princes' personal armies could consist of 300–800 warriors.¹⁶¹ Several of these Lithuanian princes conducted dynastic relationships with the leaders of neighbouring Russian princedoms. The majority of the population were, according to Lithuanian historians, free farmers united under territorial communities. Written sources also mention a stratum of *meliores*, who, in the Lithuanian state, soon formed the stratum of feudal lords.¹⁶²

The situation in late-12th–early-13th-century Lithuania is described by historians as a confederation of small kingdoms, called lands in written sources. The largest and most important of the lands was historical Lithuania, that is, the southern and eastern part of present-day Lithuania. Rulers of these lands were always fighting with each other, as well as arranging military campaigns to neighbouring areas. The whole society has normally been considered extraordinarily bellicose, a view which can, however, be attributed to the character of the written sources that have survived until our own times.

In an agreement with Halitsch-Wolynien in 1219, 21 Lithuanian and Zhemaitian princes were mentioned, five of whom were singled out as senior princes.¹⁶³ One of the latter – Mindaugas – succeeded in uniting the greater part of present-day Lithuania, as well as several regions in present-day Belarus, under his rule. In 1245, Mindaugas was already called “the highest king” in some documents.¹⁶⁴

2.4 Prussia

Prehistoric Prussia consisted mainly of the peninsula of Samland (German Samland) and adjacent coastal areas, which now embrace the north-eastern corner of Poland and part of the Russian Federation. The ethnic groups inhabiting this area have changed several times in the flux of history, but it is generally believed that the prehistoric Prussians spoke a Baltic language, which has now completely died out.

According to Vladimir Kulakov, one of the most prominent archaeologists dealing with the Prussian heritage, the social system in this area became

¹⁶¹ Nikžentaitis 2001.

¹⁶² Kiaupa 2000.

¹⁶³ Nikžentaitis 2001.

¹⁶⁴ Ligi 1968: 37–38; Kiaupa 2000.

abruptly more hierarchical in the 5th–6th centuries, when abundantly equipped burials with weapons, horses, and luxury imported items appeared among the archaeological evidence. These changes indicated, he believes, the formation of Prussian *družhiny*, that is, the military elite with chieftains and their retainers. He also believes, relying on the decreasing number of female burials in this time, that society became totally male-dominant, with the custom of suttee for the widows of warriors. Not only widows but also warriors belonging to *družhiny* sometimes had to follow their dead chieftain to the other side.¹⁶⁵

In his interpretations, Kulakov used a lot Prussian folklore data, legends collected in much later periods, although he himself admits the speculative nature of such an approach. Based mainly on folklore, Kulakov reconstructed the development of Prussian society as that of theocracy, that is, a social system ruled by priests. Such a system of a “holy kingdom” was set up, he believed, in Prussian territory in the 8th century, and developed further in the following century.¹⁶⁶ Archaeological proof of the existence of “the holy kingdom” seems, nevertheless, to consist only of the occurrence of cemeteries with Scandinavian artefacts near trade centres in Kaup and Truso. The lack of princely graves from this period is explained by Kulakov with the data of folklore, according to which chiefs and priests were buried in inaccessible places and without artefacts.

The graves belonging to members of *družhiny* near Truso and Kaup ceased at the turn of the 11th–12th centuries, which, Kulakov believes, was caused by the fact that the Prussian warriors, as a result of a conflict with the priestly upper class, abandoned their homeland and settled in eastern Lithuania and north-west Russia. The few graves with weapons and other goods in Prussia attributable to the period after the 11th century belonged to local feudal noblemen, the *Vitings* mentioned in the 13th-century sources.

Archaeologically, hill-forts and defended places in the Prussian area seem to have appeared particularly from the 8th century.¹⁶⁷ Several of them were extensive earthworks resembling similar ones in, for instance, Couronia, Saaremaa, or coastal Estonia. Viking Age and 11th–12th-century burial customs were mainly different sorts of individual cremation graves, while the 12th century indicated the adoption of inhumations as a prevailing burial rite.¹⁶⁸

165 Kulakov 1994: 144–160.

166 Kulakov 1994: 134–160.

167 Kulakov 1994: 78–82.

168 Kulakov 1994: 32–40.

2.5 Comparing Social Systems in Different Regions in the Eastern Baltic

As the overview demonstrated, the vision of late prehistoric or early medieval society has, up till quite recent times, been shaped according to the same mould in more or less all the countries on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. The interpretation of pre-state society was not based on real analyses of existing evidence, let alone any theoretical constructions, but rather on the assumption that human society must develop everywhere along similar lines.

Alas, evidence of social relations based on medieval writings is contradictory, and should only be used in combination with other sources, primarily archaeological. Foreign society, “the Other”, has in most cases been seen through the prism of the observer’s own society. The chroniclers assumed that pagan societies with leaders and their retainers were organised in the same way and possessed a similar sort of power as potentates in the writer’s own society – which, however, did not stop them from perceiving pagan societies as “primitive”.

Interpretations of late prehistoric society in different eastern Baltic areas vary as to the precise degree of features of state formation. One can’t help noticing that the areas inhabited by ethnic Balts have traditionally been seen as reaching a pre-state phase, while Baltic Finnic societies were believed to have been “less developed”. An opposing view has been presented by Šnē but is somewhat blurred by the fact that he chose to consider ethnically heterogeneous inhabitants in the territory of present Latvia as one entity,¹⁶⁹ thus intentionally or unintentionally supporting the evolutionary point of view about all human societies developing along similar lines.

At least one group of ethnic Balts, the Lithuanians, did manage to establish an early state, as appears without any doubt in written documents of the early 13th century. The general idea seems to be that, without foreign intervention, other ethnic Baltic groups could soon have reached coherent social organisation, and the same could have happened with Baltic Finnic groups in some later period.

Archaeological social interpretations of late prehistoric societies in the Eastern Baltic lands have been predominantly based on burial material that has traditionally been treated by emphasising either the lack or the abundance of grave goods. No conspicuous graves appear after the 5th–6th centuries anywhere in the eastern Baltic, which is surprising considering how different the social stratification appears according to other data. In all the lands considered

¹⁶⁹ Šnē 2002.

in this overview, Late Iron Age burial customs were characterised by a number of cemeteries and by comparatively abundant grave goods, including many weapons. No princely graves have been recorded in any of these areas.

The interpretation of social relations mirrored in burial customs depends very much on the assessment of a given community using a particular burial ground. In the southern half of the Eastern Baltic region, cemeteries, often consisting of hundreds of graves, are normally considered to represent an entire village community. Similar interpretations prevailed earlier in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic as well, but there they have changed during the last decades. Both in Estonia and Finland it is now assumed that only members of selected families, probably those forming a broader upper stratum in their society, were buried in stone graves. How the rest of the population may have been buried is not known, but such a variation in post-mortem treatment suggests quite a considerable social difference between an elite and everyone else. The number of stone graves, and even more the artefacts found in them, increased considerably in the middle or end of the 10th century, and the 11th and 12th centuries formed the period of most conspicuous grave furnishing. The phenomenon can be explained by changes in mythological thinking, but also by deepening social stratification which took place within the framework of old, pre-existing social structures.

2.5.1 *Collectivism versus Individuality*

The most conspicuous difference when comparing burial customs in the Eastern Baltic is the shortage of individual graves in the northern half of the region. It is particularly true for the 7th–11th/12th-century burial rites in both Estonia and Finland. The 12th century in both of these countries was characterised by an increasing number of individual, mainly inhumation graves, perhaps indicating changes in social systems that gradually became imitations of those of their western and southern neighbours.

More individual graves were known in Finland, predominantly in the coastal zones where overseas contacts with Scandinavians had always been close. With the exception of a few periods and areas, Estonians throughout prehistory were characterised by strongly expressed collectivist burial customs, where the remains of the dead were probably intentionally mixed in one big grave. Similar graves were also widespread at least in some parts of present-day Russia, which were once inhabited by Finnic-speaking peoples.¹⁷⁰ An exception among the Baltic Finnic ethnic groups were the Livs who, at least in the end of prehistory, never used to bury their dead in collective stone graves.

¹⁷⁰ Uino 1997: 44–54; Kochkurkina 1981: 13ff.

The Scandinavian and Baltic neighbours of the Finnic-speaking people, in contrast, practised individual burials with abundantly equipped warrior graves from as early as the end of the Stone Age. Close mutual connection between the individuality expressed in burial rites, warrior ideology, and stratification of social systems has been noticed in many countries, but such changes appeared there much earlier than the 12th century AD.¹⁷¹ The northern half of the Eastern Baltic thus formed, in this respect, an exceptional area among its neighbours.

Burial customs where remains of the deceased from some selected families were completely intermingled tend to mark societies that were neither democratic nor egalitarian, but where power structures were constructed in a corporate way. The institutions of power in such societies, normally formed as a kind of council, frequently duplicate each other and are based on different social arenas, for instance military affairs or clan structures. Executive power is certainly practised by chieftains whose mandates are, however, limited, especially when compared with potentates in societies based on individual hierarchy. Especially in more important questions these chieftains were completely dependent on councils or regular assemblies.¹⁷²

Colin Renfrew has distinguished between individualising and group-oriented societies,¹⁷³ others have brought into use the term heterarchy for characterising the corporate mode of power.¹⁷⁴ Heterarchy describes an alternative to a vertical, pyramid-like structure of power, proposing a form of organisation in which there is a horizontal spreading of power across different but equal power institutions, each of which is internally hierarchic, but where none has precedence over others.¹⁷⁵ Although just as hierarchical as other complex power structures, the corporate mode tends to leave much less conspicuous archaeological evidence. It is especially true for evidence that normally has been treated as a sign of “hierarchical” society, e.g. abundantly equipped burials or elaborate residences for leaders.¹⁷⁶

171 E.g. Kristiansen 1987; Bradley 1998; Andersen 2000; Guilaine & Zammit 2005: 158ff; Mägi 2007a; Drennan *et al.* 2010.

172 Keesing 1981: 221–300; Fagan 1991: 419–426.

173 Renfrew 1974.

174 Rautman 1998; Thurston 2002; Bondarenko 2007; Drennan *et al.* 2010. Some scholars, notably Tina Thurston, have nevertheless equated heterarchy more or less with decentralised hierarchical organisations, like chiefdoms in pre-state Scandinavia, or early kingdoms in Western Europe (Thurston 2002, 2010). In her study, the term heterarchy thus becomes another ambivalent label covering a huge range of different societies.

175 Thurston 2010.

176 Drennan *et al.* 2010.

In most of Europe, and, according to the burial evidence, also in the part of the Eastern Baltic that was presumably populated with ethnic Balts, social hierarchy was constructed around individuals. Although families certainly played a prominent role in these societies too, concrete power could be associated with and practised by particular individuals. As for their closest neighbours in the Eastern Baltic areas, this kind of society was believed to have been widespread in Scandinavia and along the southern coast of the Baltic Sea, as well as in eastern inland areas which formed the core of the *Rus'* state.

It is relevant to the subject of this book to realise that when societies with individually-based and collectively-based power structures met, the differences in their social systems probably caused serious misunderstandings. Potentates from countries with hereditary, individual-based hierarchies were obviously not able to determine who actually governed in societies with collective power structures, or who made the ultimate decisions. They might have been confused about whom to deal with for negotiations or concluding treaties.¹⁷⁷

2.5.2 *Weapons and Warriors*

Especially in Estonian archaeological material the role played by weapons as symbols in graves cannot be overlooked. In the Roman period, weapons were extraordinarily rare among otherwise very abundant grave goods, and occurred in quantity in graves only during a short exceptional period in the 6th–7th centuries. The years 650–950 were again characterised by very few weapons in graves, or, more specifically, very few grave goods generally. The sudden reappearance of the custom of putting weapons in graves in the second half of the 10th century coincides with a general increase of grave goods, suggesting ideological changes and prelude to the arrival of individual graves.

The lack of weapons in the pre-Viking and early Viking Age northern half of the Eastern Baltic was in sharp contrast with abundant weapon finds in the graves of ethnic Balts in the same period. The evidence of two different

¹⁷⁷ In our globalised world, cultural conflicts in business between e.g. China and Scandinavian states can serve as a parallel. Despite abundant handbooks and training courses, communication between companies from these two regions still tends to be complicated, to a great extent because of different power structures. Chinese businessmen often have problems with realising the situation in most Scandinavian companies where management members are normally connected with each other in their decisions. Good personal relationships with or ample entertainment of a top leader does not therefore necessarily result in the desired contract. Scandinavians, on the other hand, have problems with keeping to the strict hierarchy in Chinese companies that is expected even in details. The Chinese social network that is based on personal relationships, the concept of honour, and the fear of losing face often remains simply imperceptible to North Europeans.

ideological systems regarding weapons and warriors supports the interpretation of differently established power structures in these two regions, and coincides with gender aspects described under the next topic.

There is no doubt that warriors existed everywhere in the Eastern Baltic area, and by the 11th–12th centuries the way their status was expressed posthumously had more or less synchronised in all these regions. Nevertheless, the aforementioned differences between the individual and the collective in burial rites seem to indicate that the concrete way in which the warriors could practise their powers might have varied from strongly individual-based and hierarchical social organisations in the south to somewhat limited powers in the frameworks of collective clan-based organisation in the northern areas. The clan-based organisation probably meant that even war-lords, who appeared as “proper” leaders to their southern neighbours or, for instance, to Scandinavian Vikings, did not actually possess real power other than personal authority to force their desired solutions through in assemblies of regional or clan representatives, and particularly not in questions that remained outside the limits of their power, i.e. war activities. Although kings and princes in deeply hierarchical, pre-state or early state societies always had to take account of magnates as well, their personal influence in decision-making was presumably many times larger, as well as being supported by ideology.

2.5.3 *Gender Relations*

Gender roles are embedded within any given social organisation in a manner that is in one way or another reflected in burial rites, particularly in the composition of grave goods and the ratio of male to female burials. Comparing different Eastern Baltic regions in this respect, conspicuous differences between the southern and northern areas cannot be overlooked. In a broader social context, these differences tend to correlate with other aspects of the burial customs that differentiate these two major regions.

When the percentage of gender-specific artefacts among grave goods is high, it indicates differences in male and female dress and therefore probably points to a polarisation of the roles played by men and women in the particular society. Although it cannot be regarded as a regular rule, strictly differentiated genders commonly indicate a male-dominated society, where women are subordinated to men.¹⁷⁸ In the archaeology of the Eastern Baltic areas this phenomenon predominantly characterised the ethnic Balts, but could also, to a somewhat smaller extent, be applied to other neighbouring peoples,

¹⁷⁸ Kent 1999.

e.g. Scandinavians.¹⁷⁹ Men in the late prehistoric Eastern Baltic areas wore abundant jewellery that, for the ethnic Balts, seems to have always differed from female ornaments. The number of unisex artefacts, if they occurred, was modest.¹⁸⁰

The completely intermingled burials in Estonian and Finnish stone graves do not in most cases enable us to differentiate individuals, let alone define their gender. The phenomenon suggests that similar attitudes also dominated the society from which the funeral parties came.¹⁸¹ At the very end of the prehistoric period, when more inhumations appeared on the scene, the great number of non-gendered artefacts in these graves stands out from the rest – multiple jewellery and accessory types, as well as tools, can be found both in male and female burials.

Cross-cultural parallels have demonstrated that numerous non-gendered artefacts in graves characterise societies where gender roles are balanced.¹⁸² When a greater number of gender-specific artefacts were placed in burials, and were therefore probably used thus in real life, then less egalitarian gender roles were presumably prevalent.¹⁸³

Gender-specific artefacts are however not completely absent in Estonian Late Iron Age burials. Some jewellery, e.g. chain arrangements and spiral bracelets, occur predominantly in female graves, while weapons are more characteristic of male graves. The lack of specific male jewellery is one of the features differentiating Estonia from its closest neighbours – all the jewellery that the local men wore belonged to similar types to those used by local women. One can conclude that, for instance, a Latgalian or Lithuanian man probably considered it undignified or at least improper to decorate himself with jewellery similar to that worn by women, but such an attitude did not characterise ancient Estonian society.

179 Jørgensen 1990; Rundkvist 2003.

180 See e.g. Bliujienė 1999; Radiņš 1999; Šnē 2002.

181 It should be mentioned here that gender differences are not denoted in Finnic languages either. These languages use only one personal pronoun for both genders, which is normally perceived as confusing for the speakers of Indo-European languages. For native Finnic speakers, on the other hand, it is difficult to remember to use the correct pronouns when speaking Indo-European languages, because, except in some particular contexts, it sounds irrelevant to them.

182 Fagan 1991: 305–426.

183 Drawing parallels with phenomena that are closer and more familiar to us, the differences in male and female dress compared to gender roles now and a hundred years ago might be illuminating.

Another aspect is the ratio between male and female graves in a cemetery. Disproportion in favour of male burials is a characteristic feature of Latgallian cemeteries, but can also be found in several other inhumation cemeteries of the ethnic Balts.¹⁸⁴ The gender ratio in Livic cemeteries seems to be quite balanced, with the Laukskola burial ground as an exception.¹⁸⁵ The latter is, however, probably connected with the biggest trade centre in the Eastern Baltic, Daugmale.¹⁸⁶ Superior numbers of male burials have been reported in several burial places next to nodal points of trade.

Burial rites in other Baltic Finnic stone graves make it hard to distinguish the sex of the deceased. In cases where cremation burials can be distinguished, particularly on Saaremaa, the gender ratio within particular cemeteries seems to be balanced, and the disproportions in favour of one or another gender that sometimes occur can be considered statistically insignificant.¹⁸⁷ The gender composition also seems to be comparatively balanced in late prehistoric Finnish inhumation cemeteries.¹⁸⁸ However, in the Saaremaa cremation graves, as well as in inhumation graves in Finland, where bones do not survive in the ground, all gender estimations are based on grave goods only and not on biological analyses.

2.5.3.1 Weapons in Female Graves

In Estonia and Finland, as well as in some (especially Finnic) neighbouring areas, attributes connected with one gender sometimes occurred in graves that included items that were normally associated with the other gender. Female chain arrangement or parts of it can, for instance, sometimes be found in male graves, and weapons are recorded in some female graves.¹⁸⁹

The custom of putting weapons in women's graves, which otherwise are abundantly equipped with female jewellery and other attributes, seems to characterise predominantly Baltic Finnic burials, but has also sporadically been recorded in other North-European areas, e.g. in Birka or in Norway.¹⁹⁰ In Latgallia and Semgallia, one example of such burials is known in each.¹⁹¹

184 Šnore 1987; Apals & Apala 1994; Vilcāne 1996; Šnē 2002: 178–201.

185 G. Zariņa 2006.

186 Mägi 2011a.

187 Mägi 2002: 75–77, 171–174.

188 Purhonen 1998: 218–237.

189 Mägi 2002: 77–83.

190 Arwidsson 1986; Thålin-Bergman 1986; Pedersen 2011.

191 Radiņš 1999: 83; Vaškevičiūtė 2007. I find it important to differentiate between the occurrences of weapons in graves that otherwise are equipped with abundant female-specified attributes, and in graves that, according to most grave goods, belong to a man, but where the skeleton has been biologically identified as female. The latter cases probably illustrate

Pirkko-Liisa Lehtosalo-Hilander has reported some weapons, including one of the most luxurious swords in Finnish archaeology, in abundantly equipped female graves in Finland,¹⁹² but this custom seems to have been particularly widespread in Karelia.¹⁹³ Several Livic women have been buried together with a weapon, normally an axe or a spear.¹⁹⁴ Weapons were also quite widespread in female cremation complexes on Saaremaa,¹⁹⁵ but, because of specific problems concerning the analyses of such graves, these weapons' attachment to the complexes can always be counterargued.

Weapons in female graves do not necessarily indicate female warriors, although this possibility cannot be excluded either. Weapons have been commonly used as symbols of power, which can also be the most trustworthy explanation for their presence in the aforementioned graves. It is obvious that weapons in Baltic Finnic graves are found as a rule only in those female burials where abundant grave goods hint at the high social position of the deceased woman anyway. Female jewellery in abundantly equipped male graves may, following a similar line of thought, symbolise e.g. family affiliation. The phenomenon can also be explained in several other ways but to sum up the most essential deduction, it was not considered improper in that particular society to supply the dead with items that referred to the other gender. That the ethnic Balts almost never practised a similar custom, probably mirrors different ideology and therefore also a diverse social system.¹⁹⁶ A clear distinction between the sexes, up to a complete lack of jewellery (except for buckles) in male graves and lack of weapons in female graves, also characterises most of late prehistoric Scandinavians and several other Germanic societies.¹⁹⁷

completely different social phenomena, when a person changes his/her (biologically defined) gender (for some possible explanations see e.g. Simniškytė 2007).

192 Lehtosalo-Hilander 1984: 402–403.

193 Kochkurkina 1981: 92–93.

194 Tönnisson 1974: 109, tables II, VI; Mägi 2002: 79; Zariņa 2006: tab. 191, 1. Females otherwise equipped with abundant jewellery and other items, have sometimes also had weapons with them (for the Beyond) among the Finno-Ugric peoples in the basin of the Volga and Oka Rivers (Golubeva 1984), through which the international eastern communication route ran in the Viking Age.

195 Mägi 2002: 77–81. From distinguishable complexes, about 30% of all the cremation burials of Saaremaa women and girls contained some type of weapon.

196 Some archaeologists have recently reported on cross-gendered cases among the burials of ethnic Balts. These are either biological females buried with completely male attributes, or *vice versa* (e.g. Simniškytė 2007; Vaškevičiūtė 2007). This phenomenon should however be treated differently from the examples here.

197 Jesch 1991: 10–14, 21; Härke 1992.

2.5.3.2 Matrilineality Written in Legislation?

Several researchers have suggested that gender roles tend to be correlated with social systems.¹⁹⁸ Gender polarisation in the ethnic Baltic societies thus hints at a strongly male-dominated or warrior-centralised society, which suits the interpretation of their society as individual-based and hierarchical. The archaeological evidence of Baltic Finnic burials, on the other hand, seems to indicate comparatively balanced gender roles in their societies. This assumes that women fulfilled a role in these societies that somehow compensated for the supremacy of warrior status, which is also reflected in archaeological sources, and supported by written documents.

Some particular features in medieval legislation and folklore in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, and parallels with the cultures of anthropologically studied and archaeologically similar societies, suggest that this role could most probably be provided by a matrilineal descent system in extended families.¹⁹⁹ Swedish medievalist Nils Blomkvist has pointed out so-called Livic-Latgallian legislation from the beginning of the 13th century, which has so far attracted little attention from researchers.²⁰⁰ The first version of this document was written down in Low German as early as immediately after 1212, and presumably reflected old customs and rules among the Livs.²⁰¹ In 1214 the same document was probably also extended to Estonians, if Henry the Chronicler is to be believed. However, the only version that has survived until our own day comes from the time about ten years later, when the legislation was extended to the Latgallians.²⁰²

The legislation is unique because of its treatment of descent system issues that were mentioned in three paragraphs. Paragraph 10 claims “Then a man takes a wife. He shall then let all his goods follow his woman. If he wishes to leave her, he will lose arable land and goods. And his sons and daughters shall possess them...”²⁰³ The following part of the same paragraph can be interpreted differently.²⁰⁴ According to the present author, the most trustworthy translation is “... The inheritance that was not taken away by the son(s) goes

198 Kent 1999.

199 Mägi 2002: 146; 2009a; Blomkvist 2005: 182–191.

200 Blomkvist 2005: 182–191.

201 Nazarova 1979: 43.

202 Nazarova 1979: 51.

203 “Item ein Mann der ein Wif nimbt, alle sine guter Sall siner frwen volgen. Is dat he will vonn er wesenn, So is he quitt Acker vnnd alles gutes vnnt Sine Sone vnnd dochter besitten idt dat de Erue nicht wegk nam de Son So vellet Idt ann die tochter vnnd an die moder” (text from: Nazarova 1979: 172–173).

204 For different interpretations Blomkvist 2005: 182–191.

to the daughters and the mother”.²⁰⁵ This paragraph has confused several earlier researchers, who have claimed that the son’s precedence to inherit was simply assumed by default, and the legislation only discussed a case when for some reason a son did not want to accept his inheritance.²⁰⁶ Evgenya Nazarova added a suggestion that the topic proceeded from canon law and was invented by the church authorities in order to fight against pagan divorces. The son’s precedence in the system of descent, she claimed, was indisputable because it occurred in later legislation and in Latvian folklore.²⁰⁷

Blomkvist claimed that the son’s precedence in inheritance was never taken for granted in medieval legislation, and therefore probably not in Livic-Latgallian legislation either. The section reflected, he believed, the matrilineal descent system and matrilocal residence in extended families that existed at least in some Eastern Baltic societies, and disappeared with the crusaders’ conquest in the 13th century. The author of the present book agrees in general, but, unlike Blomkvist, believes that the matrilineal descent system could predominantly characterise the Livs and other Finnic-speaking people. As is characteristic of such systems, men joined their wife’s family, bringing with them property that would in principle be equivalent to a dowry in patrilineal systems. This property could have been kept in mind, when the topic mentioned a part of property taken away by the son or sons.²⁰⁸

The theory of a matrilineal system and matrilocal residence can be reinforced by the following paragraph, number 11, which claimed: “A widow inherits along with her daughter(s) as long as she remains a widow. If she remarries, the daughters divide the property equally with the mother”.²⁰⁹

Paragraph 10 treated the case when the man wanted to leave his wife – that is, the case of divorce. The husband’s abandonment of the wife, who kept the property, seems to indicate matrilocal, or, in this case more precisely, uxorilocal residence. In paragraph 11 the man had died, and sons were not mentioned at all.

The interpretation is somewhat confused by paragraph 17, which obliged a man to pay the debts of his brother, if he wanted to accept the inheritance

205 “...dat de Erue nicht wegk nam de Son So vellet Idt ann die tochter vnnd an die moder” (text from: Nazarova 1979: 172–173).

206 Arbusow 1924–1926: 36–38; Nazarova 1979: 46, 127.

207 Nazarova 1979: 43–47, 123, 173.

208 Mägi 2009a. It is not clear in the original text whether it mentioned a son or sons.

209 “Eine Wedwe wulange sie Wedwe bliuet mit den tochternn heuet sie Erue. Is dat se sick veranndert, so delenn de dochter dat Erue gelick mit der Moder” (text from: Nazarova 1979: 173).

from him. One possible explanation is offered by the custom of levirate that, in early-13th-century Livonia, together with sororate, formed a problem sufficiently large to be referred to the pope himself.²¹⁰ The custom of marrying the brother (or sister, respectively) of one's deceased spouse, in order to keep property in the family, characterised many traditional societies with variable descent systems. One can assume, hypothetically, that when a man replaced his dead brother, he could take over the property that the brother had brought with him to his wife's family when married, and that this was considered as taking over the inheritance.

A matrilineal descent system could have characterised some societies in the northern part of the Eastern Baltic only until the conquest in the 13th century, although in rural circles it might have survived even longer. Feudal relations introduced by German and Danish crusaders could not function without a patrilineal descent system. The last relics of possible matrilineality can be seen in Estonia in some traditions of folklore,²¹¹ e.g. in the crucial role that the birth of a daughter played in women's internal hierarchy, while the mothers of only sons were considered as belonging to the same stratum as childless women. Another much discussed phenomenon is the total female dominance in Estonian folklore, which is in a sharp contrast with the much more male-dominated and bellicose Baltic folk songs.²¹²

2.6 Conclusions

The overview demonstrated that two major cultural as well as political spheres in the Late Iron Age and early medieval Eastern Baltic can be differentiated, characterised to a certain extent by diverse social and power structures.

Present-day central and eastern Lithuania was the only area in this region where no one doubts that an early state had its beginnings in the 11th–12th centuries. It was the area with the most stratified society in the region, with quite highly developed administrative and political systems, inheritable power, and early kings or princes. The societies of the Semgallians, the Zhemaitians, the Latgallians, and the (Baltic) Couronians were characterised by male dominance and a warrior-based social hierarchy, which probably resembled that in the early Scandinavian kingdoms, or generally in most contemporary Western

²¹⁰ Brundage 1973.

²¹¹ Metsvahi 2014, 2016.

²¹² Mägi 2009a and references.

European countries. The society of the ancient Prussians can theoretically be considered as similar to these, perhaps with the somewhat unusual political influence of pagan priests.

Such social relations were familiar to contemporary Scandinavians, as well as to later actors in this part of the world, e.g. the crusaders and their chroniclers. Merchants, warlords or other representatives from most of the surrounding countries in the state-making or early state phase knew exactly which potentates to appeal to in these societies, with whom to negotiate treaties, alliances, or marriages, or cooperate in some other way.

The high proportion of gender-specific artefacts in graves can be considered as indicating strong male dominance in these societies, and therefore presumably indicate that ancestral descent was traced through the paternal line. Although family affiliation was probably important for all people, relationships of power were mainly individual in nature. A strong relationship with a particular chieftain or prince was most relevant in a warrior's life. The prince, even though he definitely had to take account of powerful members of his aristocracy, personally made decisions relevant to the entire society.

Warriors and hierarchies based on them were certainly significant in the northern East Baltic societies as well, but positions of power there seem to have possessed much more collective characteristics. Society as a whole was doubtlessly hierarchical and not egalitarian, as suggested by scholars in the first half of the 20th century. Members of dominant families were elected as representatives of their clan, as chieftains in peaceful times as well as warlords. Power structures might have been duplicated, as is common in such societies, and women might have had access to some of them – e.g. to some kind of councils for clan representatives. The descent system in these extended families was possibly matrilineal. Some of the dominant families were probably more influential than others, but this authority rested upon collective, or family-based, property and power, and was not directly associable with particular individuals.

Chieftains in these societies could rotate, come from different elite families, and their authority was presumably limited. When communicating with potentates coming from countries like Scandinavia or Russia, or with the 13th-century crusaders, communication might have been obstructed. The foreigners were not able to determine who ruled in such societies or who ultimately made decisions. In the early-13th-century chronicle by Henry the Livonian, the situation was illustrated by numerous broken treaties and political failures with the Estonians and the Livs, as well as by the fact that no real leaders were ever mentioned. Two names that occurred in connection with power, Kaupo and Lembitu, clearly possessed only limited mandates.

Although perhaps incomprehensible to some neighbours, a society which had collective power structures could function successfully, and could from time to time cooperate with neighbouring regions – certainly no less effectively than societies with individual-based and hierarchical but politically fragmented structures. Neither was their technological or economic level necessarily lower than that in more individual-based hierarchical systems; these aspects were strongly dependent on factors other than power structures, even though the latter also played a role.

A social organisation with strong collective traditions should definitely not be automatically considered as a lower stage of social development but as a cultural peculiarity – as, if we draw parallels with Scandinavia, societies e.g. on Gotland and Iceland were somewhat different from those in Middle Sweden or Denmark.²¹³ Neither is it correct to believe that societies with collective power structures should necessarily develop towards more individual hierarchies in the course of time. On the contrary, the same collective attitudes were obvious in Estonian and Latvian societies after the conquest – the role that vassals or landed gentry played in the political systems of medieval Livonia was remarkable, especially in the northern part of Estonia and on the Estonian islands.

213 Randsborg 1980; Sawyer 1982; Hyenstrand 1989; Carlsson 1990.

Making Trade: Cultural Landscapes and Communication Routes

The interpretation of Viking Age communication in the present-day Baltic States has traditionally been strongly influenced by aspects that were described in more detail in Chapters 1 and 2. The most essential of them were obviously the long-lasting vision of the sea as a separating, rather than as a uniting factor, and the idea of Scandinavian cultural supremacy through all prehistory.

One might bear in mind that access to the sea was strongly restricted for people living in the Soviet Baltic Republics. Private ownership of seagoing vessels was forbidden, and simply walking along the seashore after sunset could lead to punishment. Certain areas along the coast, for instance all Estonian islands, needed a special, visa-like permission to visit for people who did not have their official residence in such zones. In addition, a great part of the coastal population from before World War II had used their boats to escape the Soviet troops in 1945, leaving coastal villages nearly empty of inhabitants. A great part of old sea-going traditions was carried away over the sea with the refugees. Society gradually accepted the subconscious concept of sea-faring as a complicated venture, in which the sea hindered rather than favoured communication with neighbouring areas.

The present political situation was projected back in history, and helped to maintain an overly romantic vision of one-time brave seafarers and pirates on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Public attitudes were also echoed in archaeological research. The research of archaeologists who tried to deal with prehistoric or medieval overseas connections was treated as something semi-forbidden, and was frequently even defined as a kind of passive resistance to the ruling system.

More realistic treatment of prehistoric and medieval overseas communications was also hindered by several concrete constraints induced by the Soviet system, primarily the lack of exact maps. Maps that Soviet-era archaeologists could use were only for very general overviews and often deliberately misleading, while exact maps were concealed. These constraints can be considered especially relevant for Estonian maritime landscapes, where the land mass uplift is up to 3 m per thousand years. This phenomenon decreases considerably further south, and even in present Latvia the differences of coastal outlines, when compared with those of late prehistory, are not so dramatic.

For Estonian archaeologists, it remained impossible to evaluate the process of land mass upheaval realistically up to the early 1990s. Since maps with contour lines were limited to restricted files, coastlines of the prehistoric past were reconstructed quite randomly, based on very subjective estimations, which led to several misleading interpretations of former maritime landscapes. When maps to the scale of 1:10000, with contour lines at metre intervals, originally meant for the use of Soviet military forces, became available to a larger audience, the research into landscape archaeology, especially that of maritime landscapes, changed remarkably.

The virtual Iron Curtain that ran along the Baltic coast and northward through Finland for nearly 50 years restricted the flow of information from both sides. In the academic discussion in the West, one effect of these years is very selective information about Eastern Baltic prehistoric societies, based mainly on very few publications, often from the time before World War II, and on random writings in international languages from the Soviet period. An example of this is the phenomenon of Grobiņa, which frequently occurs as the only Viking Age trading place on maps hitherto published in archaeological writings. In fact, the Scandinavian colony there had already ceased to exist at the very beginning of the Viking Age. What is more, although the number of publications in English that treat prehistory in some of the Baltic States has increased considerably during the last 20 years, it is proving hard to change the prejudiced view of Western archaeologists that it is difficult to get information about the Eastern Baltic area.

Specialist study of maritime landscapes has, since the 1990s, been practised mainly in Estonia, probably because of the three Baltic States it is the one with the longest coastline and the only one with islands. There has also been quite a number of research projects focused on the development of maritime landscapes in Finland, where such research has often, as in Estonia, been linked with similar studies on the coast of Middle Sweden. Maritime landscapes have attracted much less specialist attention in the other Eastern Baltic lands though, consisting mainly of a few studies of particular places. Trade routes, however, have been discussed in several studies in Lithuania and Latvia, and hill-forts as probable trade centres have been the subject of discussion especially in the two southern Baltic countries.

3.1 Maritime Landscapes in Countries around the Baltic

The development of maritime cultural landscapes in the North is characterised by common features that were most likely, but not only, influenced by

social changes. The interest of an elite – noblemen or wealthier farmers – in controlling nodal points of international communication was presumably associated primarily with trade and piracy, and only secondarily with more common maritime activities like fishing or seal-hunting. However, the land mass upheaval had a strong impact on the development of cultural landscapes especially in the northern regions around the Baltic Sea. In addition, we should take into account technological innovations, most notably the increasing size and therefore draught of vessels in the 11th century, which presumably played a significant role in the choice of specific harbour sites.

3.1.1 *Appearance of Harbour Sites*

Different researchers have reported that harbour sites¹ around the Baltic Sea, mainly dating from the 6th century onwards, have become traceable.² This formerly “invisible” maritime activity was presumably also the result of social conditions: single chieftains simply did not possess enough political power to control harbours with a larger hinterland. These were made possible only by gradual power consolidation before and during the Viking Age.

However, it does not mean that seafaring was not practised before the 6th century, neither are harbour places entirely unknown before this time.³ The reasons why earlier harbour sites are difficult to detect archaeologically can be their infrequent use, which left fewer traces in the ground, or the generally smaller numbers of ships in earlier periods. It has also been suggested that pre-6th-century harbour sites are more difficult to find because of fewer metal items in their culture layer; at the same time, a great proportion of harbour sites have been identified in the course of metal detecting.⁴ Another possibility

1 Without going deeper into the discussion of how to define the term “harbour site”, I just state here that, in this book, a harbour site is considered a place oriented to maritime activities and accessible to water vessels, a place whose use is regulated by agreements and/or tradition, and which comprises a hinterland, thus excluding landing places of an accidental character. The hinterland of a harbour site is the area with which one or another function of the harbour site is directly connected. The size of the hinterland varies according to the function and importance of the harbour site; e.g. the hinterland of a harbour site which functions as a trade centre is normally a bigger prehistoric district. Harbours in urban centres were usually connected to international trade, and their hinterlands can embrace whole regions (see also Mägi 2004).

2 Carlsson 1991; Ulriksen 1998: 134–138, 194–195, 216–223.

3 Single harbour sites dated earlier than the 6th century are however known in the countries around the Baltic as well – notably Lundeberg on the south-eastern coast of the island of Fyn, which had its beginning as early as the 3rd century, or a century later Sorte Muld on the island of Bornholm in Denmark.

4 Thrane & Porsmose 1996; Ulriksen 1998: 17–19.

is that the use of river harbours was more widespread before the 6th century; this type of harbour is particularly complicated to distinguish from “ordinary” settlement sites. On the other hand, the same localisation difficulties characterise pre-6th-century settlement sites in general, where they have normally been explained as a periodic movement of a settlement within a larger settlement unit.⁵

The 6th century is frequently seen as revolutionary in areas around the Baltic Sea (see also Chapter 2). In the Eastern Baltic the 6th–7th centuries were marked by suddenly increasing Scandinavian elements in the local cultures, especially in the coastal zone. The change seems to have been particularly dramatic in the northern half of the eastern Baltic, where earlier close connections with the eastern and south-eastern shore of the Baltic were gradually replaced by more intensive communication with the west.⁶

The 6th century, everywhere in the northern countries, including Estonia, saw a settlement shift from the coast towards locations a few kilometres inland.⁷ This has normally been explained by times of unrest, the threat of pirates, and the generally increased belligerency of society. These ideas are supported by the reappearance of fishing villages only a few hundred metres from the actual coast in the 13th–14th centuries, when the centralised power succeeded in minimising the danger of sudden attacks from the sea.⁸

3.1.2 *Viking Age Maritime Landscapes*

Harbour sites and trade centres around the Baltic became more “visible” from the 8th–9th century.⁹ Roughly at this time, Baltic Sea ships were equipped with sails.¹⁰ Several archaeologists have pointed out that the artefact material from harbour sites of this period changed: imported prestige ware was now complemented by imported but quite common items like bronze jewellery, glass beads, and combs. This phenomenon is believed to be linked to the development of trade.¹¹ Social processes connected to this development brought with them more effective control over trade, and the centralisation of trade

5 Göthberg 2000: 105, 150–166; Solberg 2000: 150–154; Jensen 2004: 30–33; Welinder 2009: 395–398.

6 Mägi 2006.

7 See e.g. Crumlin-Pedersen 1991; Näsman 1991; Christoffersen & Porsmose 1996; Welinder 2009: 395.

8 Crumlin-Pedersen 1996.

9 Ulriksen 1998: 194–195, 217–223; Filipowiak 1999; Rebkowski 1999.

10 Westerdahl 1995; Ulriksen 1998: 219–222.

11 Christophersen 1991; Ulriksen 1998: 222–223; Bogucki 2004.

places. At harbour places of more central importance, visitors could now stay longer, for instance for the whole navigable season; craftsmen who were interested in selling their labour and production also joined them for a longer time. Merchants and other seamen visiting such places paid taxes to the chieftain(s) controlling the place, and the latter in turn guaranteed their safety for the time they stayed in the harbour. Smaller harbour sites with a more local character nevertheless continued their existence parallel to the bigger ones, although their importance for trade, especially that of an international character, probably diminished considerably.

In Scandinavia, the concentration of trade into single large harbours or trading centres is believed to have been caused by the centralisation of political power. These were early urban centres, whose commercial practices and tax revenues were controlled by the kingships being established.¹² The same development can however also be seen in areas without the direct jurisdiction of the early kings. The island of Gotland, for instance, had six main harbours in the Viking Age.¹³ By the Middle Ages, all trade in Gotland was concentrated in one place – the town of Visby – while all other harbour sites had been abandoned or functioned now only as small insignificant landing places used only by single farms.¹⁴

3.1.3 *Movement of Harbours in the 11th–12th Centuries*

The next clearly visible change in the development of maritime activities around the Baltic was the moving of harbour sites closer to the open sea in the 11th–12th centuries.¹⁵ This move has often been associated with the drift of centres, and primarily the establishment of towns.¹⁶ However, the phenomenon is apparent also in those Baltic regions where no towns developed in the 11th–12th centuries, e.g. Estonia. It is more likely, therefore, that the move of harbour sites was predominantly caused by the appearance of large cargo-carrying ships, mainly since the 11th century, and was in certain areas accelerated by the increased speed of land mass elevation. The latter was caused by the falling water level between the end of the Viking Age and the 12th century, after a warm period during the Viking Age, and this, together with the ordinary processes of land mass upheaval, changed the coastline beyond

¹² Ulriksen 1998: 222–228.

¹³ Carlsson 1998.

¹⁴ Westholm 1985.

¹⁵ For the phenomenon in Scandinavia see e.g. Callmer 1991.

¹⁶ Ulriksen 1998: 222–228.

recognition in a comparatively short time. These changes, however, were not so obvious in the southern half of the Baltic Sea countries.

Starting from the 11th century, the number of ships on the Baltic Sea definitely increased, and several different variants of sea craft appeared. Large cargo carriers were brought into use. By the 12th century, they could carry 60 tons – the same load as cogs, which entered the scene from the late 12th century onwards.¹⁷ The draughts of these deep-sea cargo carriers were comparable with the cogs, too, reaching up to 1.5 m with a full load. All these changes meant that the 12th century is considered, according to current research, as the period of the major shift in northern ship-building.¹⁸ The new large ships needed harbours with deeper water, which resulted in the abandonment of several earlier harbour sites. This process was only accelerated by the land mass elevation and lower sea level, described above, which had in any case hampered access to several harbour sites.

Archaeological studies in Estonia during the last decade have demonstrated several parallel lines of development between the changes of maritime landscapes in Estonia and other areas around the Baltic Sea, notwithstanding the differences in late prehistoric social structures.¹⁹ Whether it is also valid for Latvia and Lithuania is somewhat difficult to judge because of insufficient study in this field to date. Real harbour towns with significant importance for international trade nevertheless did not arise in the Eastern Baltic before the 13th century, which can be explained by the lack of centralised power in most of the local societies. Together with some bigger and more influential trading places, there existed numerous harbour sites of regional and district importance, controlled by local chieftains or elite families.

When Estonia and Latvia were conquered by German and Danish crusaders in the first half of the 13th century, the political formation usually called medieval Livonia was established. Like the previous social structure in these areas, medieval Livonia was not a centralised state either, but consisted of the nearly independent domains of different overlords. The bulk of international trade was now concentrated in towns, founded in Estonia and Latvia immediately after the conquest. The location of the medieval towns was chosen according to the substantial trade routes between the west and the east; when old trade centres on these routes already existed, they were taken over. Four medieval towns in Estonia and eight in Latvia belonged to the Hanseatic League, four of them situated on the coast or in the vicinity of the sea.

17 Crumlin-Pedersen 1991b, 1991c.

18 Crumlin-Pedersen 1999.

19 Mägi 2004b.

3.2 Long-distance Trade Routes through the Eastern Baltic

All international trade routes from Scandinavia to the east – the *Austrvegr* mentioned in early medieval written sources – passed through the Eastern Baltic lands (Figure 3.1). More exactly, the ships bound for the Volga River might have nearly always sailed through the Gulf of Finland, while those bound for Byzantium could choose between several routes through the present-day Baltic States or north-eastern Poland.

3.2.1 *Austrvegr – The Way to the Volga*

The Viking Age or earlier seafaring technology did not encourage the passage between the Swedish coast and the estuary of the Neva River (where St Petersburg now stands) without overnight stops, at least not in routine traffic (Figure 3.2.). Although it was possible of course to stop in natural landing places, it always brought the risk of local attack. Harbour sites regulated by some form of tradition and agreements offered, at least to some extent, safety for both the crew and the cargo as well as the possibility of replenishing the ship with food and fresh water, or of repairing it, if necessary.

The southern coast of Finland is rocky and full of numerous reefs and small islets that made seafaring dangerous without the help of an experienced pilot.

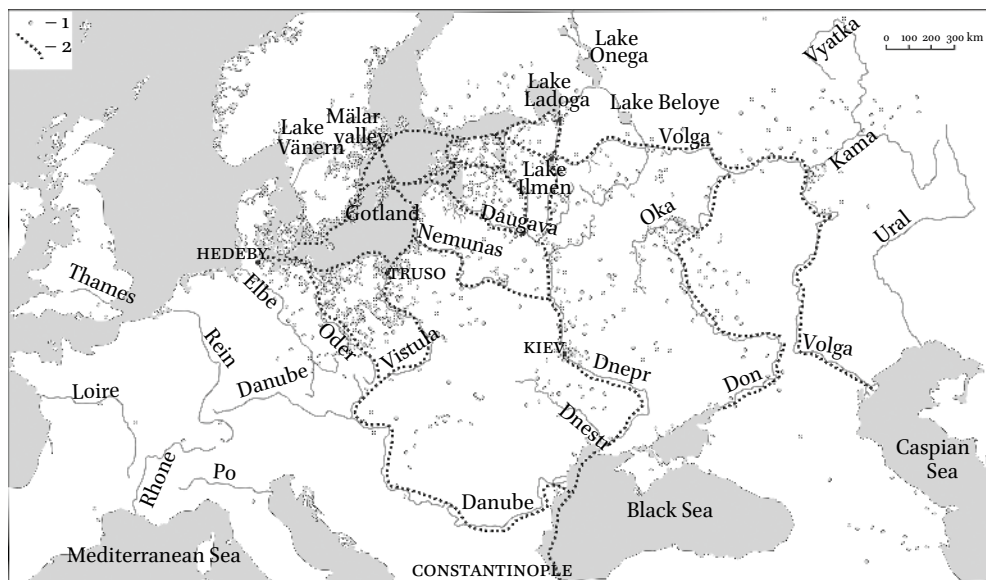


FIGURE 3.1 *The most relevant Viking Age long-distance trade routes through the Eastern Baltics and the southern coast of the sea. Dots mark finds of dirhams (based on Jansson 2000, Fig. 3; Steuer 2009, Fig. 2; Leimus 2007b).*

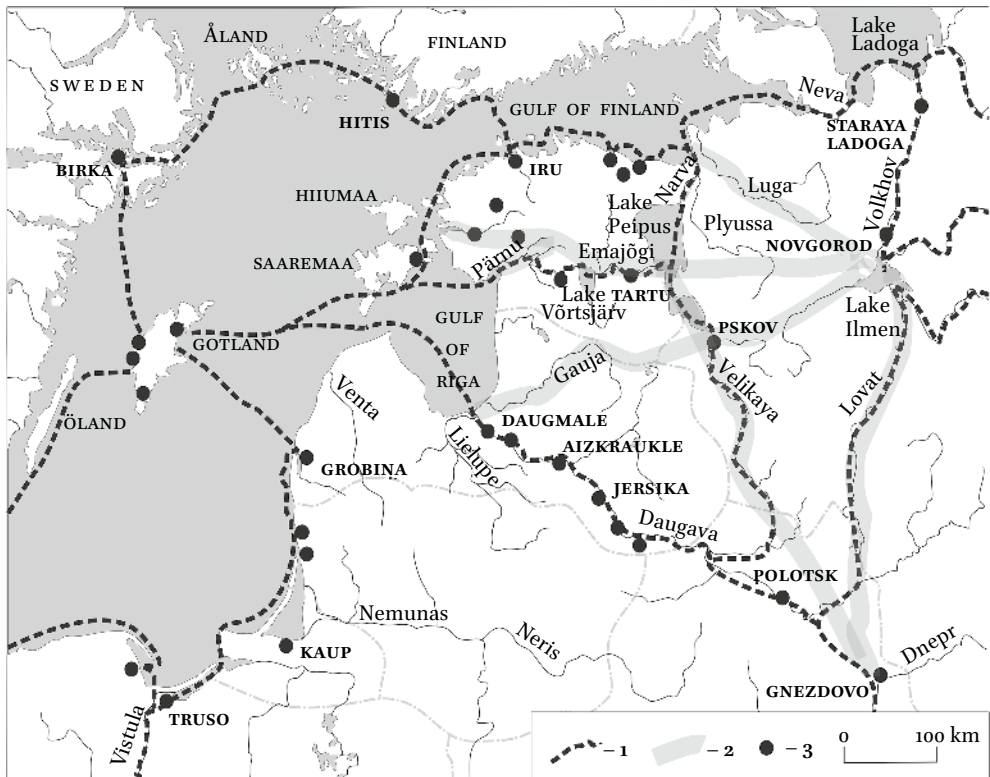


FIGURE 3.2 Long-distance trade routes and centres connected with them in the 9th–12th-century Eastern Baltic. Not all centres were in use at the same time. 1 – water routes and routes over watersheds, 2 – some relevant winter routes over frozen lands, 3 – centres.

On the other hand, there was little arable land in the vicinity of the southern Finnish coast, and the late prehistoric population of these areas might have been sparse. When forced to stop for a somewhat longer period, e.g. because of a storm or unsuitable winds, ship crews travelling along the coast of southern Finland thus risked supply shortages. These aspects suggest that the commonly used sailing route led along the densely inhabited and naturally more suitable north Estonian coast instead.²⁰

Some Finnish scholars have tried to prove that the southern Finnish coast was, however, preferred for Viking Age travelling. Anna-Liisa Hirviluoto has analysed archaeological material along the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland. She suggested that it indicated the importance of the trade route along this

20 Mietinen 1988; for a description of a part of the route in a 13th century document see e.g. Edgren 1995.

coast, which, she believed, was easier to sail along even though geographically it meant a longer route for ships sailing from Middle Sweden towards Ladoga.²¹ However, the archaeological material along the Estonian northern coast, many times more abundant than the quite modest finds in south Finland, was totally excluded from the discussion. The only archaeological evidence from the Eastern Baltic cited in her article came from the estuary of the Daugava River and Couronia. Literature from the Baltic countries was difficult to access in the 1970s, and all private sailing along Estonian coasts was forbidden by the Soviets. The estimation of how intensely different water routes were used relied more on the political conditions of the time than real archaeological evidence.

A similar opinion, that the Eastern Way might have predominantly run along the southern Finnish coast, was repeated by Pekka Sarvas in early 1980s.²² He explained the lack of settlement and finds, including dirhams, along the southern Finnish coast by the military activity of Vikings, and thus used this phenomenon as an argument demonstrating the importance of this presumed trade route. Why the situation was remarkably different along the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland, characterised by intensive settlement and a great number of dirham hoards, was not discussed or even mentioned in his brief article.

However, later Finnish researchers seem to support the interpretation that the position of most of present-day Finland (except Åland and the south-western corner of the country) remained peripheric in the Viking Age silver trade.²³ At the same time, one can believe that some ships chose to sail along the south Finnish coast anyway, even though the majority probably preferred the southern route.

The most prominent harbour site along the north Estonian coastal route was where present-day Tallinn is situated. Tallinn Bay, which is naturally protected from strong winds by two peninsulas and two islands, is one of the most suitable natural landing places along the whole north Estonian coast. It is also the point where the sea-route from Middle Sweden and through the Åland islands turned down from the south-western Finnish coast towards the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland, if one intended to avoid the complicated sailing conditions of the southern Finnish coasts. On the other hand, Tallinn Bay with its harbours also called for a different set of seafaring skills, from rocky archipelago full of reefs to an open-sea coast with dangerous winds

21 Hirviluoto 1978.

22 Sarvas 1981.

23 Raninen & Wessman 2014; Haggrén *et al.* 2015: 327–329; Moilanen 2015: 309.

and shallows.²⁴ Søren Sindbæk, who considers the presence of a topographic barrier a relevant precondition for the appearance of nodal points, has seen a similar change underlying the location of Åhus on the south-eastern Swedish coast, for instance.²⁵

Pre-Viking and Viking Age harbour sites that functioned as mercantile central points were directly dependent on their hinterland, and were therefore never situated far away from agricultural districts.²⁶ The vicinity of a district with good and comprehensive arable lands is clearly the factor that distinguished the Tallinn Bay coast from several other suitable harbour places in north or north-west Estonia. This would explain the location of the hill-fort of Iru, a few kilometres from the coast along the Pirita River. This river, the biggest in northern Estonia, functioned as a communication route between the coast, the hill-fort, and settlement around it, and agricultural settlement units upstream.²⁷ The hill-fort of Iru was first inhabited in the Bronze Age, and was brought into use again in the 6th century AD.²⁸ However, some sort of harbour site seems to have existed near the site of medieval Tallinn as well.²⁹

Sailing further on along the well-populated north-east Estonian coast, one could continue the journey along the south-eastern coast of the Finnish Gulf, present-day north-west Russia. Unlike the landscapes in northern Estonia, these regions were thinly populated throughout prehistory, and far into historical times.³⁰ It was and still is a region of extensive wetlands and other areas not very suitable for agriculture, and therefore with only a sparse population. From the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland one could then continue along the Lakes Ladoga and Onega further towards the east or south-east. An often used alternative route was probably to turn first towards the south to the trade centre at Staraya Ladoga, then to Novgorod or Ryurik's Gorodishche, and from Lake Ilmen along several rivers stretching eastwards to the Volga River and the Caspian Sea.³¹

24 See also Hirviluoto 1978; Tönnisson 1988.

25 Sindbæk 2009.

26 Mägi 2004.

27 Mägi 2007b.

28 Lang 1996: 34–104, 476–477.

29 Mägi 2015.

30 Petr Sorokin, who has pointed to the River Luga east from Narva as one outlet from Novgorod to the Gulf of Finland, reports on a cluster of hill-forts in the lower reaches of the river, while the area generally was thinly populated (Sorokin 1997: 22–23).

31 See also Nosov *et al.* 2005: 23; Nosov & Khvoshchinskaya 2006.

3.2.2 *The Daugava Way*

The most intensively used Viking Age route between the Baltic Sea and Byzantium probably ran along the River Daugava/West-Dvina in present-day Latvia and Belarus.³² The most prominent western trade centre on this route was Daugmale, a mighty hill-fort with its nearby settlement, about 22 km from the sea in the lower reaches of the Daugava River. This centre was also established as early as the Bronze Age, existed through the Viking Age and the 12th century, and was later replaced by medieval Riga.³³ The Daugava River, which has the greatest flow of water in the region, was however impeded by more than a hundred rapids along its path through present-day Latvia alone.³⁴ These rapids were impassable, and meant reloading cargo and hauling or portaging the ship to the other side of the rapid. The location of hill-forts next to a number of these rapids provides evidence of pressure to pay tolls to local potentates. The Daugava rapids and how to pass them was the subject of regulation in an early-13th-century treaty between the bishop of Riga and the master of the Brethren of the Sword, and the prince of Smolensk. Thus it seems by no means accidental that a road running along the Daugava River was mentioned in the same treaty as an essential alternative route to the river itself.³⁵

Approximately at the site of Polotsk in present-day Belarus, the prominent eastern centre on this river route, it was then possible, negotiating watersheds, to move on to the River Dnepr, sail to Kiev, and from there further south towards the Black Sea. Since the River Dnepr flows freely at this point, this part of the route was probably the most convenient one. However, the Dnepr River had rapids, too, north of the Black Sea. These are known from written sources, several of them by name, as places where travellers were attacked by local Petchenegs.³⁶ Having negotiated these dangers safely, one could sail to the Black Sea, and from there to Constantinople. This was presumably the most important way through the Rus territories, and is therefore sometimes known as the Great Route.

3.2.3 *The "Route from the Varangians to the Greeks"*

When sailing from Middle Sweden and along the coast of north Estonia, it was possible to continue to the Neva River, Lake Ladoga, and then turn down

32 The river is called Daugava in Latvia, and West-Dvina in Belarus.

33 Rādiņš 2001; Zemītis 2007.

34 Most of the rapids have disappeared by now owing to the building of several hydropower plants on the Daugava River in the 20th century, which have dammed water in several parts of the river and flooded a number of prehistoric sites.

35 Rādiņš 1998.

36 Page 1995: 93–97.

along the Volkhov River to the Ryurik's Gorodishche, or, after the end of the 10th century, to Novgorod on the shore of Lake Ilmen. From this lake it was then possible to travel towards the south, along several rivers and watersheds, and reach the River West-Dvina (Daugava) at approximately the location of the later town of Vitebsk. The rest was the Great Route described above in the text, along the River Dnepr to Byzantium.

As for geographical conditions, the river system of present-day north-west Russia formed perhaps the most complicated part of the route from Sweden to Byzantium. Trade routes over north-east European rivers were difficult to travel. Most of them contained rapids and waterfalls, were simply too small or too shallow for navigation, which meant reloading cargo several times, as well as needing vessels more suitable for rivers than for open sea sailing. Several researchers have therefore indicated the importance of winter routes in historical long-distance trade in the North, in which the frozen river systems could be in intensive use.³⁷

The route from Sweden, by way of Novgorod to Byzantium, was described in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, and is therefore generally known as "the Route from the Varangians to the Greeks". The chronicle was, however, written down only in the early 12th century and accordingly reflected the reality of that time, not of the Viking Age as, in its first sections, it claimed to treat. For instance, although Novgorod was an important political centre in the 12th century, it did even not exist before the middle or even the end of the 10th century.³⁸ Accordingly, the centre that was called Novgorod in the chronicle must actually have been Ryurik's Gorodishche a few kilometres away, which, however, was not yet a town. The route described in the chronicle would have produced on the ground a very large detour for travellers heading south. Before the emergence of the urban centre in Novgorod, and the stabilisation of the political situation in the region, it was likely that the northern part of the Great Route was not the most frequently used way after all. Merchants might have preferred to travel through Staraya Ladoga and Ryurik's Gorodishche mainly when heading to the Volga-Bulgar area or even further east.

3.2.4 *Alternative Route through Pskov and Polotsk*

Another route to Byzantium from Middle Sweden, the core areas of the Svea state surrounding Lake Mälaren, was to sail along the Finnish and Estonian coasts as described above, and turn down along the River Narva to Lakes Peipus

37 Sindbæk 2003, 2005: 247–254 and references.

38 Jansson 1997; Nosov 2001; Nosov *et al.* 2005: 23–32.

and Pskov between present-day Estonia and Russia. Then it was possible to continue along the River Velikaya, and, through Pskov in its lower reaches, directly southwards, where it crosses a watershed to link up with the West-Dvina-Dnepr route at Polotsk. That the route was probably used quite frequently is demonstrated by the existence of Pskov, which was a centre of a principedom semi-dependent on Novgorod.³⁹ Both Pskov and Polotsk had their origins as urban centres a little earlier than Novgorod, in the 10th century at the latest.⁴⁰

Early-13th-century writings indicate that there was also close communication between Pskov and Novgorod, which is reflected in similar archaeological finds, especially ceramics.⁴¹ The evidence of similar find material reaches back to the Viking Age. Travellers' descriptions from the late medieval and early modern period emphasise the connection between Pskov and Novgorod even more. Especially in wintertime the route from Riga through Tartu, Pskov, and Novgorod was chosen, even by travellers continuing towards Moscow. This route is cited, for instance, as one of two main routes through medieval Livonia in the Itinerary of Bruges from 1380–1390.⁴² Although it was probably most convenient to use in wintertime, one could also travel along it in summer, combining water and land transport.

Polotsk, the centre of another principedom of Kiev-Rus, was situated 370 km from the Baltic Sea, along the Daugava River. Polotsk's interest downstream along the Daugava River was obvious, and clearly indicated in the status of other centres along this route – Jersika and Koknes – as vassals to the Principedom of Polotsk. In the early 13th century, at the latest, the Livs in the lower reaches of the Daugava River were described as being dependent on the prince of Polotsk, too.

The prominent role of Polotsk during the Kiev-Rus period can mainly be explained by its position at a nodal point where, from one direction, trade routes from Novgorod and Pskov reached the Daugava River, and where, from the other direction, it was possible to continue towards Smolensk, Kiev, or Constantinople. As was typical for the early centres of Kiev-Rus, medieval Polotsk was predated by an 8th–10th-century hill-fort and settlement complex at the Polota River, 1.5 km from the place where this tributary joined the Daugava River, and where the medieval centre was established in the 10th century.⁴³

39 Sorokin 1997: 17–21; Kiudsoo 2013.

40 Gurevitch 1970; Nosov *et al.* 2005: 119.

41 Ambrosiani & Bäck 2007.

42 Raid 2005: 17.

43 Gurevitch 1970.

The status of Polotsk as a crucial nodal point was obvious in the endless fighting between Polotsk and Novgorodian princes, especially in the 11th century.

3.2.5 *Alternative Route through Central Estonian River and Wetland Systems*

Another alternative through the Eastern Baltic when heading further east through Novgorod, or to Byzantium, was a less known trade route through central Estonian river systems, along the present-day Pärnu, Navesti, Täna-silma, and Emajõgi Rivers, through the east Estonian trade centre Tartu to Lake Peipus and further on to Pskov, where it was possible to continue as described above. Although in central Estonia this route currently consists of smaller and non-navigable rivers, the earlier conditions were more suitable for sailing with river-boats, especially during the Viking Age when the climate was warmer and more humid, and particularly in early spring when the water level could rise several metres.⁴⁴

Later changes in Estonian terrain were caused by land mass upheaval, reversion to swamps, and climatic changes towards colder and dryer conditions, starting particularly in the 13th century.⁴⁵ These factors combined to make the rivers in central Estonia difficult to navigate. The Emajõgi River uniting the two big lakes, Võrtsjärv and Peipus, has the greatest flow of water in Estonia, and was easily navigable both up- and downstream. The route between Pärnu Bay and Lake Peipus has nevertheless been marked as one large river on nearly all medieval or early modern maps, and it has been mapped separately even as late as the 17th century.⁴⁶ In the 17th century the Swedish state made serious efforts to bring the route into use again, insisting on cleaning and dredging works on the rivers that had become hardly navigable after a long period of wars, but nothing came of them.⁴⁷

Trade in the prehistoric North was extraordinarily dependent on the seasons. The sea route to Novgorod along the north Estonian coast was normally navigable for 5–6 months a year around summer time, was not usable during early spring and late autumn, and could be used as an ice-road during the winter months. Communication over frozen ice in the coastal zone, although widely practised by locals, hardly formed part of international trade. When the land, with its wetlands, rivers, and lakes was frozen, it was much more suitable

44 In our time, the water level in wetland rivers eastward from Pärnu rises 2–5 m, and normally remains so during 1–2 weeks in March or April.

45 For a parallel change of landscape in Middle Sweden, see Larsson 2007: 161–166.

46 Ehrensverd 2001: 64–65; Raid 2005.

47 Küng 2009.

to travel via more direct routes. According to topographic conditions, the most convenient way from Eastern Baltic coasts to Novgorod (outside the summer season, when the sea was navigable) was through the frozen river-system and vast wetlands in central Estonia to Tartu, and from there further on through Pskov. Moving along the Velikaya River, and then over the watershed to other small rivers leading to Lake Ilmen, it was possible to use other winter roads from Novgorod as far as the Volga or Dnepr River, where, in spring, one could continue sailing.⁴⁸ The same changeover was available the other way round. When travelling from some Rus centre towards Scandinavia, it was also easy to use the flood period in March or April for sailing via this route to west Estonia, where it was possible to continue over the open sea westwards.

The relevance of the central Estonian waterway must already have been considerably reduced in the 13th–14th centuries, but in the 1770s people still remembered it as a once important water-route.⁴⁹ In late prehistory and the early Middle Ages there were apparently enough merchants who chose the central Estonian route even in the summer season instead of, for instance, the River Daugava, a choice which seems to be indicated by the establishment of three Estonian Hanseatic towns – Pärnu, Viljandi, and Tartu – along this route soon after the incorporation of present Estonia into the western sphere. It took longer to travel along this route than sailing directly to Daugava, but demanded fewer reloadings of goods, thus making transportation cheaper, less laborious, and perhaps even faster overall.

Viljandi and Tartu were established no later than the Viking Age.⁵⁰ No Viking Age trade centre has been found at the site of what later became Pärnu. Nevertheless, this is predictable, bearing in mind the location of harbours and trade centres in pre-state societies, and the extensive infertile soils and wetlands around the Pärnu site. Trade centres in societies without considerable concentration of political power were as a rule located not right on the coast but at a distance from it, and the presence of agricultural soils nearby was essential for their location (see also above in this text).⁵¹ Using the central Estonian route however needed centres in the western part of it, where it was possible to wait for the rivers and wetlands to freeze over properly, or, conversely, the sea to become navigable. It is likely that the hill-fort of Soontagana functioned in this way from the 7th–8th centuries, and the hill-fort of Lihula could have had a similar function in late prehistory.

48 See also Mäss 2003.

49 Hupel 1774: 123.

50 Tvauri 2001: 245–246; Haak 2005.

51 Mägi 2004b.

3.2.6 *Routes along Latvian and Lithuanian Medium-sized Rivers*

In present-day Latvia and Lithuania, there are several rivers which certainly played an essential role in local, or even inter-regional trade, but which can hardly be considered parts of international routes. Exceptions are certainly the Daugava River that was treated above, and probably also the Nemunas River, which is the largest flowing through Lithuania.

Through the Livic areas north-east of the estuary of the Daugava runs the Gauja River. It ends at the present-day border between Latvia and south-east Estonia, without clear river systems running further towards the major international routes. It is however clear that the Gauja River was frequently used in inter-regional trade, combined with mainland routes towards Tartu, and further on to Pskov.

More or less the same is true for the Lielupe River with its numerous tributaries, which connects Semgallian areas with Riga Bay. In its lower reaches, Lielupe is united with the Daugava River, and originally formed a tributary of the latter. However, it is impossible to see the Lielupe River as an international trade route, since neither the river itself, nor its tributaries lead on to other route systems. About a 20-km-wide zone in the lower reaches of the Lielupe River is wetland or sandy areas without a prehistoric population.⁵²

Of the other medium-sized rivers in present-day Latvia and Lithuania, the most noteworthy of them, the Venta and the Minija in Couronia, are considerably smaller and can only have functioned as communication routes at district level.

3.2.7 *The Amber Way and the Route along the Nemunas (Memel) River*

Lithuanian archaeologist Vlasdas Žulkus has written about the water route along the Nemunas River that flows from present-day Belarus through Lithuania to the Couronian Bay. He believed that the river was navigable in both directions from the coast as far as present-day Kaunas, but was used much less intensively after that point. The Nemunas, he claimed, like other larger or medium-sized rivers in the Eastern Baltic, was comparatively slow in the lower reaches, and therefore it was easy to sail both down- and upstream. The river, especially the upstream part of it, was also easy to use in winter, when it was frozen.⁵³

The Nemunas River, as well as its biggest tributary, the Neris,⁵⁴ had its source in the north-western quarter of present-day Belarus. It could therefore

52 In our time, the resort-town of Jurmala is situated there on the coast itself.

53 Žulkus 2007.

54 In Belarus, the Neris River is called Viliya.

function as an inter-regional communication route between the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, central Lithuania, and western districts of Kiev-Rus, primarily the areas belonging to the Principedom of Polotsk. There was no direct connection from the Nemunas or Neris/Viliya to Kiev and the Dnepr River, although it certainly was possible to reach there using a combination of land and river routes.

However, the Nemunas River had, according to some research, changed its estuary after around the year 1000 AD. During the Viking Age, the lower reaches of the river flowed along what is now the River Pregolya (Pregel), and ended, instead of in the Couronian Lagoon, in the Vistula Lagoon, where Kaliningrad⁵⁵ is situated in the present-day Kaliningrad Oblast of Russia.⁵⁶ In that configuration, it created a connection between Viking Age nodal point Truso at the lower reaches of the Vistula River and the central areas of Lithuania, as well as Kiev-Rus princedoms in the area of present-day Belarus.

The route starting from the Couronian coast and continuing upstream along the Vistula River is often called the Amber Route – since amber from the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea could be one of the most valuable items of trade moving this way. From the estuary of the Vistula River, amber and other commodities were then transported down to southern Europe and Byzantium.⁵⁷

3.3 Travelling along Viking Age Routes

3.3.1 *Winter and Early Spring Routes*

During several months of the year, northern harbours were inaccessible to sea vessels due to frozen water. During cold winters, on the other hand, it was possible to access at least some islands over the frozen sea. Islands became isolated in late autumn and early spring when the sea was partly frozen but not yet covered with load-bearing ice; depending on weather, this situation could sometimes last several months, or even throughout the whole winter.⁵⁸ This could have been especially true for the Viking Age when the climate was milder than during the 12th or later centuries.

Inland, the winter routes ran along frozen rivers and over wetlands, which did not need such long-lasting low temperatures as the sea to freeze properly.

55 Until World War II, Königsberg in Prussia.

56 Žulkus & Bertašius 2009.

57 Kulakov 1994: 113–123.

58 Even in the 19th century the non-load-bearing ice could sometimes isolate Estonian islands from the rest of the world for several months.

Especially in forested areas like Estonia, Latvia, or north-west Russia, the winter routes were often more used than summer roads, even as late as recent centuries. Good preconditions for winter routes were created by vast wetlands that characterise Estonia in particular,⁵⁹ and also to a degree north-west Russia. In Latvia, the area covered by wetlands is already considerably smaller, and even fewer are present in the Lithuanian landscape. The combination of vast forested areas and extensive wetlands must have made winter-transport especially attractive for the area of present-day Estonia.

Russian archaeologist A. Miklyayev has suggested that rivers in Viking Age north-west Russia were even used predominantly as winter routes. Miklyayev has hypothetically reconstructed the route between Novgorod and Gnëzdovo at the Dnepr River near present-day Smolensk (535 km), which, according to him, it was possible to cover in 7–14 days in wintertime.⁶⁰

Sindbæk, who supports the idea of the relevance of winter routes, wrote that experimental trips with prehistoric means of transport had demonstrated that travellers from Scandinavia heading to Byzantium could not avoid spending winter in Russia. According to his information, the distance from Staraya Ladoga to Gnëzdovo at Dnepr could be covered more than twice as fast with sledges along frozen rivers as along the same route with boats. Contemporary backing for the theory is provided by a remark by Constantin Porphyrogenitus from the 10th century, that the *Rhos* came to Kiev in spring, and there bought a boat for continuing their journey down along the River Dnepr. This seems to indicate that the trip from further north to Kiev was taken in winter.⁶¹ The only disadvantage with the system was that a ship's cargo needed several sledges and horses for transportation; on the other hand, time and resources were saved by avoiding frequent portages and transshipment.⁶²

Indirectly, the use of wintertime land-routes through the northern part of present-day Russia in the 11th century can be seen in Adam of Bremen's descriptions. Adam, whose knowledge of eastern geography does not seem to be very strong, believed in a regular water-route from the Baltic to Byzantium:⁶³

There is a gulf, Einhard says, that stretches from the Western Ocean towards the east. This gulf is by the inhabitants called the Baltic because,

59 In Estonia, about 22% of the area of the country is wetland. This number must have been significantly bigger before the intensive drainage works in the course of the last 400 years.

60 Miklyayev 1992; see also Edberg 2003.

61 Page 1995: 93–97.

62 Sindbæk 2003, 2005: 247–254.

63 Adam of Bremen, 4:10.

after the manner of a baldric (*in modum baltei*), it extends a long distance through the Scythian regions even to Greece.

However, somewhat later in the same book he mentions hearing about the possibility of travelling the same route over land:⁶⁴

Those who have a knowledge of geography also assert that some men have passed by an overland route from Sweden into Greece. But the barbarous peoples who live between make this way difficult; consequently, the risk is taken by ship.

It seems probable that rivers through the Eastern Baltic region were used as winter routes as well, although this does not diminish their importance as water routes during warmer seasons. As was pointed out above for the central Estonian river system, several and sometimes different water routes could be used in early spring, when water from thawing snow flooded marshy areas, and raised the water level in rivers by several metres.⁶⁵ Soon after the flooding season, or even at the same time, the open sea became navigable. Before the flooding season it was probably far too dangerous to sail over the sea, even if it was mainly open. Travelling downstream along the flooding rivers is, accordingly, especially suitable when bound for Scandinavia or further west.

3.3.2 *Choosing the Means of Travel*

The role of mainland routes, especially those in wintertime, seems to have been comparatively important, at least in the medieval trade in Livonia. At least some of the mainland routes could also have been used predominantly in the winter. In 1633 Adam Olearius, who participated in an embassy to the Russian czar, sailed from Lübeck to Riga, where he waited for suitable sledging conditions. With horse-drawn sledges, it took ten days to reach Tartu, and six days from Tartu to Narva.⁶⁶ However, conditions for travelling, the building of roads, arrangements for guaranteeing safety, the provision of overnight stops, and other facilities might have been considerably more established in the 17th century, compared with late prehistoric periods. Another well-known route was the mainland route along the River Daugava, which was described in a contract between Germans and Russians in 1229.⁶⁷

64 Adam of Bremen, 4:15.

65 Flood waters in spring have been intensively used in modern times, especially for transporting heavy commodities such as timber (for Estonia, see e.g. Küng 2009).

66 Olearius 1996/1656: 9–12; Edberg 2003.

67 Radīņš 1998.

As for warmer seasons, most of the mainland roads in prehistory and the Middle Ages were riding trails, and most transportation was undertaken on horseback. At least in Sweden, the network of roads suitable for two-axle wagons only became more widespread in the 17th century, even though they existed in principle even before this. The same picture is given in skaldic poetry of the North: land journeys were made on horseback in summer, and on horseback or sledges in winter, while wagons were used mainly for ceremonial purposes because of the poor state of the roads.⁶⁸

A relevant difference between land and water transport modes might have been the time that the journey took, as is also indicated in some medieval chronicles. The length of a journey at sea was dependent on several factors, first of all the exact route, weather conditions, the type of ship, and whether the ship sailed non-stop or was drawn ashore at night. Some idea of how long travelling could take in the Viking Age might however be formed from the cases described in early writings. Adam of Bremen has written how sailing from present southern Sweden to Birka in the 11th century took about five days (without landing at night), while by land the same trip had taken a month.⁶⁹ Light and fast warships could sail from Middle Sweden to Novgorod in five days,⁷⁰ while ethnographic data and experiments with Viking-style ships suggest a length of 14–41 days for such a journey.⁷¹ In the 11th century, it took about 30 days to sail from Denmark to Novgorod, probably with a cargo ship and regular stops at night.⁷² Average speeds for Viking Age sea-going cargo ships can thus be calculated to have been 29–37 km a day, while warships could cover 90–164 km a day.⁷³

Average speeds for vessels sailing along inland bodies of water could have been approximately 23–24 km a day, at least in the 8th century. This is generally more complicated to estimate owing to lack of sources, but also because of remarkably different conditions in these water routes.⁷⁴ An experimental trip with a replica Viking ship *Aifurs* from Novgorod to the estuary of the River Dnepr in 1996 took nearly three months; however, for more than 250 km of this trip the ship had to be transported over land.⁷⁵ According to Olearius' description from the 17th century, it took six days with a boat from Staraya

68 Larsson 2007: 141–142.

69 Adam of Bremen, 4:28; Larsson 2007: 140.

70 Adam of Bremen, 4:20.

71 Sindbæk 2005: 246 and references.

72 Adam of Bremen, 4:11.

73 Ellmers 1984: 248–253.

74 Ellmers 1984: 253.

75 Sindbæk 2005: 246.

Ladoga to Novgorod (210 km), including the delays when crossing rapids, that is, they travelled about 35 km per day. Trips from Novgorod to Moscow with sledges took 14 days, with average speed of 37 km per day.⁷⁶

Rune Edberg has estimated that it was possible to cover approximately 30–35 km on rivers by boat in a day, 20–45 km on roads with horse-drawn wagons, and 30–50 km with a horse-drawn sledge.⁷⁷ A group of riders might have ridden 40–45 km a day, and in Othere's writing from the 9th century it has been calculated that about 50 km per day was possible when sailing along the Norwegian coast.⁷⁸

3.3.3 *Near the Coast and at Open Sea*

Several researchers have emphasised that sailing in prehistoric times happened for preference along coasts and in daytime, so that land could always be seen.⁷⁹ Detlev Ellmers has argued that this is especially true for the period before the Viking Age, while direct sailings over the open sea became gradually more common with the beginning of the Viking Age.⁸⁰ The invention of sails, which happened in the areas around the Baltic Sea in the 7th–8th centuries, would undoubtedly have led to a different kind of navigation and patterns of behaviour at sea.⁸¹

The change of sea routes is particularly well demonstrated by the position of Gotland in the seafaring network, as well as by the cultural network of communication reflected in archaeological material. It is possible to travel to Gotland by way of the island of Stora Karlsö, sailing eastwards from the northern end of the island of Öland near the Swedish eastern coast, thus never entirely losing sight of known landmarks. Direct sea-routes from Gotland towards the east were brought into use only in the mid-7th century.⁸² The special importance of Gotland in 11th-century eastern-bound traffic seems to be emphasised by Adam of Bremen: “[an island] ... which is very near Scania and Götaland, is called Holm, the most celebrated port of Denmark and a safe anchorage for the ships that are usually dispatched to the barbarians and to Greece”.⁸³ As for archaeological evidence, the increased relevance of sailing routes over the open sea was shown by the sudden appearance of Gotlandic, as well as central

76 Olearius 1996/1656: 26–31; Edberg 2003.

77 Edberg 2003: 117.

78 Larsson 2007: 141 and references.

79 Callmer 2009.

80 Ellmers 1984: 228–232.

81 Westerdahl 1995; Ulriksen 1998: 219–222.

82 Ellmers 1984: 229–230; for examples see e.g. Saint Óláf's Saga, 64.

83 Adam of Bremen, 4:16.

Swedish material in the coastal districts of the Eastern Baltic. The invention of sails can thus be considered one of the most decisive preconditions making it possible to build up a trade network oriented towards the east during the following centuries.

Researchers agree that safety was paramount in Iron Age and early medieval sea-faring, as well as probably in other modes of transport. Nevertheless, some have noted that sailing near the coast could not always have been the safest way. First of all the character of a coast must be taken into consideration. Archipelagos and shallow sandy coasts with sudden strong winds needed different experience and the ability to cope with different natural conditions. Especially in archipelago landscapes that are widespread along an extensive part of Scandinavian and Finnish, as well as west Estonian coasts, the help of pilots was necessary and frequently used. When a pilot was not available and the skipper unfamiliar with local waters, it was often safer to stay away from the coast. In the open sea, the journey could also be continued at night, getting maximum use out of currents, suitable winds, or other weather conditions.⁸⁴

The choice of sailing routes was however not determined only by natural conditions, but, and probably to a greater extent, by the danger of possible attacks. Written sources indicate that robbery in the Baltic Sea during the Viking Age and early medieval period was commonplace, and ships used to sail in convoys for protection. Piracy was socially accepted behaviour and often led by people of considerable rank and wealth.⁸⁵

There seems to have been a kind of system of keeping watch from elevated positions near the coast, possibly with beacons along the coasts and the reporting of sightings of foreign ships anywhere approaching the Baltic Rim. The choice between sailing close to a coast in order to use landmarks, and sailing in the open sea far enough from the sight of land was thus strongly influenced by what relations the travellers might have had with local people. It was impossible to guess the intentions of fleets from far away, and a counter-attacking fleet could have been called into action from lookout places before men on board the ships at sea could even see the land properly. People on the coast could without any special surveillance system, in favourable weather and from an eye-height of about 3 m, observe a ship at a distance of about 18.5 km, while from lookouts strategically situated on hills or bluffs along the coast the distance could reach up to 55.5 km.⁸⁶ If counter-attacking ships were sent out

84 Ulriksen 2009.

85 Bill 2009.

86 The calculations are based on a ship of the same size as the one found in the Gokstad mound (Bill 2009).

from land, they remained hidden below the horizon for a while before being noticed from the ships at sea.⁸⁷

A proper social network embracing good relationships with local inhabitants and the use of pilots could therefore have been the best guarantee for visiting fleets of cargo ships. Without social guarantees, the danger of being observed from a foreign coast was very high, and especially ships sailing alone or in smaller groups were probably often attacked. In particular, landing in places outside harbour sites, which was often necessary, could have been dangerous in areas where the movement of these ships was constantly observed from the coast. Their landing places could not remain secret, and the risk of being attacked by locals was high.

Applying to the Eastern Baltic coastal areas the calculations made by Jan Bill, the need to take the coastal population into account is very evident (Figure 3.3.). It is especially true for ships bound for the east – whatever route chosen from those described above, the ships had to sail either through the beginning of the Gulf of Finland near present Tallinn, or enter the Gulf of Riga. From the high limestone bluffs along the north-western Estonian coast it was possible, especially when using lookouts, to observe the traffic almost as far away as the Finnish coastal archipelago. This simply improved the favourable position of Tallinn Bay between these bluffs (see above in this text). In combination with the neighbourhood of extensive clusters of arable land a few kilometres south of Tallinn Bay, the situation was perfect for a centre that was actually established here at Iru as early as the late Bronze Age, and next to medieval Tallinn in approximately the same time.⁸⁸

The entrance to the Gulf of Riga was possible only through quite narrow straits, and the inhabitants of the Estonian island of Saaremaa must have had full control over them. It is understandable, in the light of this, why the inhabitants of Saaremaa were considered the most dangerous in the region in the 13th-century sources, which especially emphasise their supremacy at sea. The situation might have been similar several centuries earlier.

There are high dunes and bluffs in several places along the Couronian coast, from which ships sailing along the coast could easily be observed. However, it was possible to keep away from viewers on the dangerous coast, if the skipper so chose. On the other hand, coastal settlements in Couronia were much more vulnerable to unexpected attacks than in most of the northern half of the Eastern Baltic. Especially in weather conditions suitable for the attackers, a hostile fleet could come quite close before the locals noticed it from the

87 Bill 2009.

88 Mägi 2015; Bernotas *et al.* 2017.



FIGURE 3.3 *Jan Bill has attempted to calculate the distance at which a Viking ship making landfall would have come into view in fair weather for a lookout standing on the beach and on a platform 3 m above the sea level. The size of a vessel is based on the Gokstad ship. Depicted are the results of Bill's calculations transferred to the Baltic littoral.*

coast. The temptation to plunder especially these areas of the Eastern Baltic was probably reinforced by extensive and generally better arable lands in the coastal areas (Figure 3.4.), with a dense population and probably more booty to be gained. These conditions can easily explain why most Couronian centres, especially the ones associated with hill-forts, were situated tens of kilometres inland. The best known trade centres in this area – Truso, Kaup, and Grobina – were protected by long and narrow peninsulas that separated them from the open sea.

3.3.4 *On Inland Waters*

Ulrike Teigelake, who has studied inland water routes in Germany, has emphasised the different nature of travelling along these routes, compared with

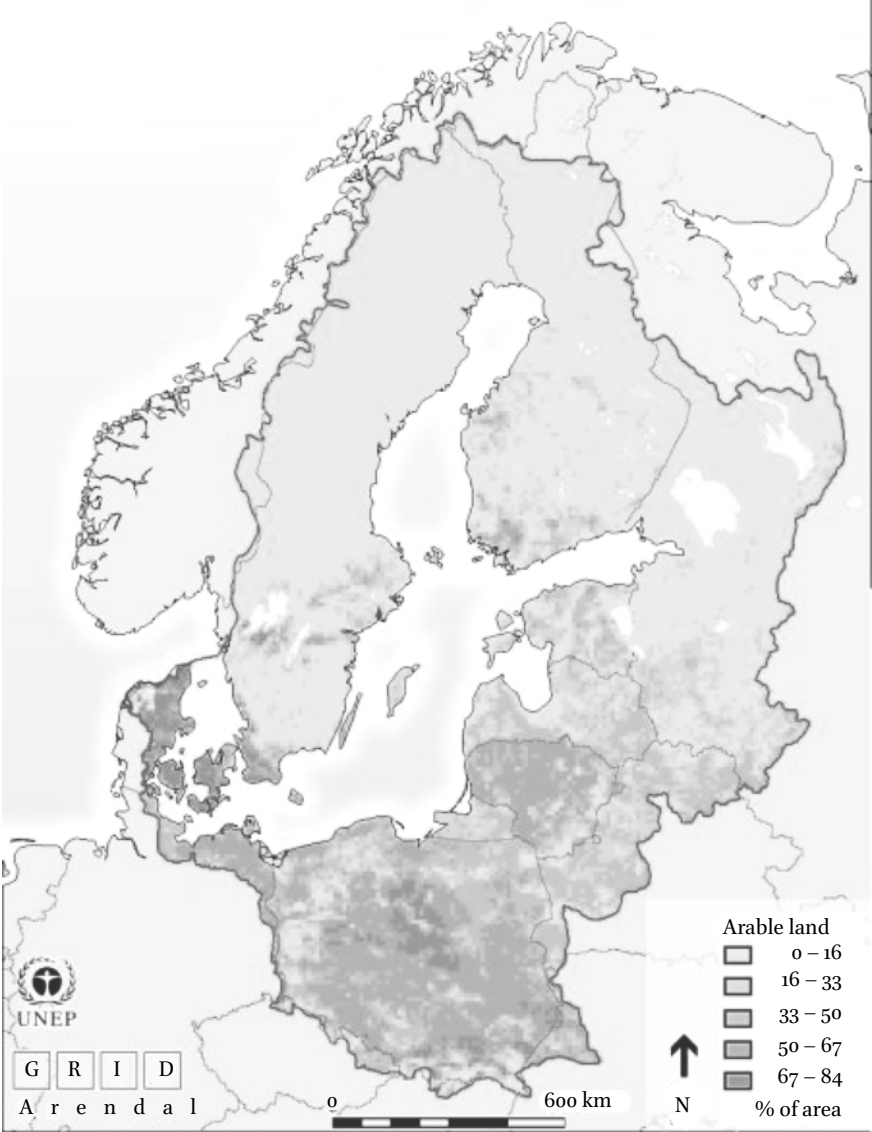


FIGURE 3.4 *Ratio of arable land out of total land use in the Baltic Sea drainage basin (displays the situation at approximately 1990). Available http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/arable-land-in-the-baltic-sea-region_bc7f#, 19.01.2015.*

a journey along a coast, let alone the open sea. Vessels that were used on rivers were normally constructed differently and were smaller than sea-going ships.⁸⁹ As for the northern part of the Baltic Sea area, Larsson has demonstrated that two big ship-building zones existed in Scandinavia, east Scandinavian ships being lighter than south Scandinavian ships, and therefore better suited for sailing on rivers.⁹⁰

Specialised river boats were probably needed, or at least preferred, on most of the Eastern Baltic or north-west Russian rivers. River boats could, owing to their shallow draught, land directly on the shoreline, without the need for a quay or other structure. It was especially the points where smaller rivers joined larger ones that were preferred as landing places.⁹¹ Sometimes the shoreline was modified, in order to facilitate loading the vessels. In the Eastern Baltic, such a modified river harbour has been excavated at Pälla on southern Saaremaa.⁹²

Teigelake has also pointed out the difficulties in “proving” the prevalence of shipping along rivers and lakes, despite its likelihood. Evidence for it, in the form of ship-finds or anything else, is non-existent or extremely difficult to find. In reconstructing inland water routes, secondary evidence is therefore often used. This comprises import finds, traces of conspicuous wealth or power found near waterways, the presence of hill-forts along possible water-routes, or natural communication lines in the landscape.⁹³ Primary evidence, like river harbour sites or ship-finds, is rare. River harbours are also very difficult to distinguish from ordinary settlements on riverbanks.⁹⁴

In addition, we have to take account of terrestrial changes during all the centuries between the Viking Age and our own time. The river systems in, for instance, Middle Sweden were intensively used for sailing according to the saga literature, although it often looks incredible at the present time. It is nearly impossible to understand how some small ditches once formed parts of important river-routes. However, their present appearance is the result of land-development and drainage works in recent centuries.⁹⁵ Charlemagne’s project to build a channel between the Rivers Altmühl and Rezat in southern Germany can serve here as an example that even 4-metre-wide and 60-cm-deep ditches

89 Teigelake 2003.

90 Larsson 2003, 2007: 57–140.

91 Teigelake 2003.

92 Mägi & Nurk 2008.

93 Teigelake 2003: 55–56.

94 Mägi 2004b.

95 Larsson 2007: 161–166 and references.

were considered navigable around 800 AD.⁹⁶ The situation was similar everywhere in the northern part of Europe, and certainly also in the Eastern Baltic.

As for the Eastern Baltic, international transport along smaller rivers mainly applies to the central Estonian river-system. Cargo and probably also boats must have been hauled over several portages along this route, even when the high water in early spring was used. Still, on the Daugava Route, hundreds of rapids needed to be crossed, too, and sailing down to Lake Peipus along the Narva River involved at least one waterfall.

There is some evidence that not only cargo, but ships as well were hauled over the sometimes quite long portages between North-Russian rivers. How local peasants carried goods through portages in Russia, charging a *denga* for each load, is described in medieval sources. It was, however, also possible to change boats when travelling over passages.⁹⁷ Early written sources, including Scandinavian sagas, indicate that it was often common to carry boats over several watersheds or passages.

3.4 Points in Communication

The Eastern Baltic is a region of hill-forts. The number of late prehistoric hill-forts increases considerably from the north to the south, and the greatest number of them are known in present-day Lithuania. The size of hill-forts can vary, ranging from tiny ones, with space for only one or two buildings within them, to those with enclosures of several hectares and massive fortifications, where there was room enough for many hundreds of people. The function and importance of these hill-forts varied a great deal, and there are certain temporal and geographic differences in hill-fort types, too.

In Eastern Baltic archaeology, trade centres have conventionally been seen as connected with hill-forts and settlements beside them; there have seldom been attempts to interpret individual settlements as trading places, and special harbour sites without hill-forts next to them have only begun to be studied in some regions during the very last decade. Characteristically for Eastern Baltic archaeology in general, hill-forts have been preferred subjects for excavations, while settlement excavations are comparatively rare and mainly connected with modern building projects. As a result, much more is known about hill-forts, especially their fortifications, than about activities carried out inside or outside their walls.

96 Ellmers 1984: 232–233.

97 Edberg 2003; Larsson 2003: 90–91 and references.

Settlement patterns with hill-forts in the vicinity of trading places occur in large areas in the eastern and southern coast of the Baltic Rim, and are in some cases also represented in the eastern part of Sweden, notably in Birka. The presence of hill-forts along possible inland water-routes in present-day Germany can, on similar lines, be considered a criterion for looking for a trading place.⁹⁸ Still, probably not all hill-forts were connected with trade. Some of them were too small; others were used only as places of refuge in case of emergency, as may be suggested by their modest or almost non-existent cultural layer. Nevertheless, a great proportion of the mightiest hill-forts were succeeded by medieval towns, and thus continued their function as political and economic centres.

As is characteristic of most archaeological evidence in the Eastern Baltic, there are considerably greater differences in the interpretations of hill-forts and their nearby settlements in different countries, than the sites themselves appear to differ from each other. This present chapter intends to give an overview of interpretations in general, treating individual trade-places and hill-forts in more detail in later parts of this book.

3.4.1 *Early Urban Centres in the Eastern Baltic Lands*

It is traditional in Latvian and Lithuanian archaeology to consider large settlements beside or around a number of late prehistoric hill-forts as early urban centres and trade places. Although parts of these settlements have also been excavated, this view seems to be largely based on material collected from graves. At least in Latvia, an increase in the abundance of grave goods as well as the occurrence of more burial places in general has led to the opinion that the 10th–11th centuries brought about great changes in technology and the economy. These processes led to the appearance of professional merchants, the intensification of trade, and the appearance of early urban centres.⁹⁹

In the Viking Age, there were strongholds built on the banks of the Daugava River at distances of 20–40 km. They were normally located next to the rapids, which can be seen as natural barriers in the intensively used water-route, and which were probably the most relevant factors behind the selection of their location. Several of the Daugava hill-forts probably functioned as tax-collecting points for when the vessels and goods had to be landed and launched again at the other side of the rapids.

The most prominent of these hill-forts was Daugmale, but Aizkraukle, Koknes, and Dignāja can also be included among the strongest and best

98 Teigelake 2003: 55–56.

99 Rādiņš 1999: 131–53.

investigated ones. From the 11th century, Dignāja was replaced by Jersika on the other side of the river. Jersika and Koknes stand out especially as more influential political centres and the residences of local princes, at least in the 12th–13th centuries. International trade is believed to have played a much smaller role in them, as indicated by the rather modest number of coins found at these sites.¹⁰⁰ All these hill-forts possessed settlements in the vicinity, interpreted as early urban centres, at the end of prehistory.

The importance of Daugmale, the largest complex in the lower reaches of the Daugava River, has been emphasised several times before in this text. The complex consisted of a hill-fort, settlements, a harbour, and several cemeteries. Archaeological excavations began at Daugmale as early as the 1930s, but the greatest part of the trading place and harbour site there were uncovered in the 1960s and 1970s, owing to building works for a power station on the River Daugava (Figure 3.5.). Following these rescue excavations using Soviet style methods, the 2-ha early urban centre was flooded, thus sealing it off from any further excavations using later methods.

The complex of Daugmale was situated at the meeting point of different ethnic groups, and was probably not a political but rather a trade and workshop



FIGURE 3.5 *Excavations at Daugmale hill-fort in 1937.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY V. ĢINTERS (LVNM EXCAVATION REPORTS AA 460).

COURTESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LATVIA.

100 Radiņš 2001.

centre (see Section 6.3.1.). The result of hastily carried out rescue excavations at Daugmale is a rich find of material, but only a modest number of publications. Most of these writings lack a more wide-ranging discussion of the site, and instead concentrate on artefact typologies and ethnic issues.¹⁰¹ A few articles discussing the function of Daugmale as a nodal point rest upon the definition and interpretation of Viking Age *vics*, given by Gleb Lebedev in the publication which still stands as a cornerstone in East European settlement archaeology.¹⁰² West- and North-European approaches to early urban centres have attracted much less attention.

Latvian archaeologists also interpret settlements around several Semgallian and Couronian hill-forts as early urban centres (e.g. Mežotne, Tērvete, Kuldīga, Talsi, Sabile). Although they cover, according to general interpretation, several hectares, sometimes even more than ten hectares, only a few of them have been archaeologically excavated.¹⁰³ Couronian hill-forts of both pre-Viking times as well as later centuries (except Grobiņa) are also normally situated at least 20 km from the coast,¹⁰⁴ which makes it difficult to see their direct connection with overseas trade routes, although some researchers have tried to make a case for this.¹⁰⁵

The trading centre in Couronia, marked as the only Viking Age nodal point in the Eastern Baltic on so many maps in archaeological publications, is certainly Grobiņa. The urban centre in the vicinity of Grobiņa hill-fort is estimated to have been 3 ha, but this area, though tested archaeologically, is essentially unexcavated.¹⁰⁶ Still, the site is interpreted by Latvian archaeologists as an early urban centre similar to Haithabu or Birka,¹⁰⁷ an interpretation that seems to rest predominantly upon evidence from graves and the interpretation of written sources.

The importance of Grobiņa as a nodal point of international trade is brought into question by its location on the Couronian coast, on the bank of the small River Ālande. The location was presumably determined by a suitable harbour site at a small lake or lagoon near the sea-shore. It is however difficult to define Grobiņa as a crossing point of essential trade routes, although a mainland route running towards the east probably started there.¹⁰⁸

101 Radiņš 2001 and references.

102 Lebedev 1985; Zemītis 2007.

103 Urtāns & Asaris 1998; Urtāns *et al.* 1998; Asaris *et al.* 2008: 114–118.

104 Žulkus 2001; Zabiela 2008.

105 Žulkus 2001; Žulkus & Bertavičius 2009.

106 Virse & Ritums 2012.

107 Petrenko & Urtāns 1995: 14–19.

108 See also Bogucki 2006.

One of the biggest and best investigated complexes of hill-forts and early urban centres is Mežotne at the Lielupe River in Semgallia, slightly more than 50 km south of Riga. The complex consists of two hill-forts, a 13-ha settlement between them, and two cemeteries in the neighbourhood. The settlement is dated to 500–1200, the main hill-fort to the 9th–14th centuries. Romas Jarockis has suggested that Mežotne can be interpreted as an early urban centre that participated in international trade since the 9th century at the latest.¹⁰⁹ The question of what the internationally important trade routes passing through Mežotne might have been was however left open. As with Mežotne, the location of several other Latvian early urban centres, at a distance from the more important trade routes suggests that their main role was in trade between neighbouring regions; a number of them might rather have functioned as predominantly political centres.

3.4.2 *Settlements with Hill-forts and Hill-forts as Trade Centres*

Most Late Iron Age Finnish hill-forts are on bedrock, but also on ridges. The first have very modest occupation layers, or none that have survived. This can, however, be explained by natural conditions, which enable comparison between most Finnish hill-forts and central Swedish ones; a thick culture layer, as characterises most of the Eastern Baltic hill-forts, is absent from the Finnish ones. Most researchers agree that Finnish hill-forts have no systematic connection with communication routes, hardly matching the role of ordinary settlements. Even less have they so far been seen as trade centres on international trade routes.¹¹⁰

In Estonia, where the number of hill-forts is considerably greater than in Finland, and natural conditions for building them different, archaeologists talk about a system of hill-forts with adjacent settlements. The system made its appearance in the 5th–6th centuries, and was abandoned around the year 1000.¹¹¹ Starting from the 11th century, settlements right next to hill-forts seem to have disappeared, while hill-forts generally became much bigger than before, sometimes taking the shape of tiny fortified towns with room for nearly a thousand inhabitants.

The majority of 7th–9th-century hill-forts are known in the south-eastern quarter of Estonia; these were mostly quite small and lightly fortified. Although these hill-forts were normally situated close to rivers, it is hard to consider them

¹⁰⁹ Jarockis 2001.

¹¹⁰ Taavitsainen 1990: 118–139.

¹¹¹ E.g. Tvauri 2013: 56–59.

being connected with trade on a larger scale than at a local level. At the best excavated of them – Rõuge – a considerable number of Kufic coins, as well as a great number of beaver bones have been found (Figure 3.6.). Some Estonian researchers believe, therefore, that especially in the 9th century the site was a point where hunted beavers were gathered from nearby villages, and where the fur (and perhaps castoreum¹¹²) was processed and sent further eastwards.¹¹³

The most prominent excavated hill-fort of the pre-Viking to mid-Viking period in Estonia is probably Iru, situated 8.5 km as the crow flies from medieval Tallinn, on the bank of the Pirita River (Figure 3.7.). In the Viking Age it remained 4–5 km inland from the river mouth opening into the Bay of Tallinn. The time of prosperity for Iru hill-fort was the first half of the Viking Age, when about 0.5 ha of the hilltop was used, and in addition there was a settlement



FIGURE 3.6 Excavations at Rõuge hill-fort in the 1950s (TLU AI 1-81-17-90-ji).

PHOTOGRAPH BY M. SCHMIEDEHELM. COURTESY OF ARCHIVE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH COLLECTIONS, TALLINN UNIVERSITY.

¹¹² Castoreum is the exudation from the castor sacs of the beaver, which was widely used in traditional medicine.

¹¹³ Leimus & Kiudsoo 2004.



FIGURE 3.7 *Excavations at Iru hill-fort in 1984.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY E. VÄLJAL (TLU AI 1-19-27A-14). COURTESY OF ARCHIVE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH COLLECTIONS, TALLINN UNIVERSITY.

outside the walls.¹¹⁴ A narrow terrace between the stronghold walls and the river, where the culture layer was particularly intensive, can be interpreted as a possible river harbour.¹¹⁵

Valter Lang has assumed that the emergence (or actually re-emergence, since the hilltop had already been in use in the Bronze Age) of the Iru hill-fort in the 6th century and its prosperity in the Viking Age was caused by agrarian settlement moving there from surrounding areas. He claimed that the number of inhabitants in nearby areas dropped in that period, arguing from the apparent decrease in the number of stone graves.¹¹⁶ The number of cemeteries of that period in the vicinity of the hill-fort itself is however also very modest, and the shortage of graves characterised more or less the whole of Estonia during these centuries. The move of the settlement was, according to Lang, caused by some unspecified social or political pressure in society, but trade had no role to play in it. He believed that the unimportance of the role of trade was proved

¹¹⁴ Lang 1996: 34–104.

¹¹⁵ Mägi 2007b.

¹¹⁶ Lang 1996: 476–477; 2004.

by the general tendency for north Estonian coastal hill-forts and settlements next to them to be situated not immediately on the seashore but on riverbanks some kilometres inland.¹¹⁷ In some later publications, although holding on to these ideas, Lang has also called Iru an early urban centre.¹¹⁸

An alternative explanation is, however, that the Iru complex, like other similar hill-forts with or without settlements in north Estonia, was not a permanent living site in the 7th–10th centuries but a trade centre as occurred everywhere in northern Europe in the same period. These hill-forts probably lacked an extensive year-round community, except perhaps for a magnate's household, some craftsmen, and group of guards with their families, and more people gathered there only seasonally. It is also difficult to imagine how the small area of arable land at Iru could provide permanent living for the abruptly multiplied population, or what profit the social elite would gain from the semi-compulsory movement of people to the edge of arable lands, as Lang has suggested in his theory. The location on a river-bank a few kilometres inland from the actual coast is quite characteristic of Viking Age trade centres as well, and does not necessarily cast doubts on their function as trading sites.

The find material at Iru does not differ much from that in other pre-Viking and Viking Age settlement sites in Estonia, simply being more intensive than average, and bearing clear traces of workshop activity. The number of artefacts indicating far-reaching contacts is not very impressive, consisting mainly of some foreign ornaments and Kufic coins as well as 11th-century European coins (see Section 6.2.1.). Find material similar to that from agrarian settlements does however also characterise many of the Viking Age harbours/trading places in Scandinavia, excluding only the most essential nodal points of international trade.¹¹⁹

What was presumably an important nodal point on the Pärnu River-Emajõgi River route, with a large settlement nearby, was Tartu.¹²⁰ Intensive archaeological excavations at the later medieval town have proved that the hill-fort – settlement complex had its beginnings as early as the 8th century. Although so far nearly all researchers have considered Tartu as the centre of trade and local manufacture in eastern Estonia,¹²¹ this has been challenged by archaeologist Andres Tvauri. Since no scales or weights were found in archaeological excavations at the later medieval town of Tartu, and the collection of coins

117 Lang 1996: 372–373.

118 Lang 2004.

119 E.g. Carlsson 1991; Ulriksen 1998: 113–142.

120 The area of the settlement at Tartu is estimated to have been more than 20 ha in the 11th century, see Tvauri 2001: 246.

121 E.g. Lang 2004.

consisted of only a single prehistoric coin,¹²² Tvauri suggested that prehistoric Tartu was not a trade centre, but just an ordinary settlement. Another supporting argument for his suggestion was that the waterway through the central Estonian rivers never existed.¹²³

Tartu and some other, more central hill-forts were exceptional in Estonia, where most settlements next to hill-forts disappeared in the 11th century. The development of this aspect of the cultural landscape is clearly different from what we could see in the southern half of the Eastern Baltic. Instead of the enlargement of open settlements adjacent to hill-forts, as in present-day Latvia and Lithuania, large hill-forts appeared in Estonia, where several hundred people could live inside the walls. With some few exceptions like Tartu, no intensive cultural layer has been detected immediately outside these fortifications.

At least some of the large hill-forts presumably functioned primarily as trade-centres on a regional level. Lang, who considers them as places where a great number of people lived permanently, has suggested that they can be called early urban centres.¹²⁴ For logistical reasons, however, it is more likely that these places became heavily populated only seasonally, and for most of the year there could only have been a smaller group of households present.

Most such hill-forts occurred or were re-built from some earlier fortifications in the late 11th and 12th centuries, and some of them remained in use until the second quarter or the middle of the 14th century. Several of them were characterised by locations in the midst of broad wetlands, remote from densely populated areas, and were therefore probably connected with winter routes especially along the vast central Estonian wetlands. Varbola and Soontagana in particular, which both had their fortifications rebuilt in stone in the 12th–13th centuries, can be assumed to be places where commodities were gathered from winter routes, and transported further on to the open sea in early spring, using high water levels caused by thawed snow.

Some large Estonian hill-forts were also situated nearer to settlement centres, at a distance of 5–7 km from the coast, and had an outlet to the sea by way of a smaller river (e.g. Pöide, Pada). Harbour sites of such hill-forts are known and even excavated in individual cases. Nearly all of the hill-forts were very strongly fortified, several of them surrounded by a massive dry-stone wall.

122 According to Estonian numismatist Ivar Leimus the general number of Kufic coins found in the area of medieval Tartu and the nearest locality is about 20 (Leimus 2007: 97–98). In 2006, a hoard consisting of nearly 50 dirhams was found on a terrace at the foot of the hill-fort (Kiudsoo 2007). Mauri Kiudsoo has also drawn attention to the concentration of late prehistoric silver hoards in the surroundings of Tartu (Kiudsoo 2013).

123 Tvauri 2001: 191–193, 208–212.

124 Lang 2004.

In contrast to Latvia and Lithuania, there is not a widespread tendency to interpret settlements next to hill-forts as early urban centres in Estonian archaeology. Some researchers have talked of trade centres, and some more recent scholars, notably Lang, of the possibility that the term urban centre could be applied to late prehistoric-early medieval large hill-forts.¹²⁵ It seems that the most essential trade centres in Estonia were those functioning as political centres as well, at least in the later part of prehistory. They did not first appear only in the 11th–12th centuries, like the large hill-forts described earlier, but in the 5th–6th centuries, some of them even as early as the Bronze Age. These were also the prehistoric centres that were later replaced by medieval towns, the most important of which were Tartu and Tallinn.

3.4.3 *Harbour Sites and Possible Trade Centres*

As mentioned earlier in the text, only a few excavations have been conducted at early urban centres in Latvia and Lithuania. However, sites were defined as urban centres only when there was a hill-fort in the vicinity. Excavations at separate open settlement sites have been much rarer and less informative everywhere in the Eastern Baltic. One of the reasons for this is probably the widespread building technique – horizontal logs, rarely with some post constructions – that has left only vague remains in the ground.

In the last decades several excavations have been carried out at smaller, regional or district level harbour sites in Estonia, especially on the island of Saaremaa. Such harbours were normally located close to district centres, and were used primarily by the inhabitants of surrounding villages and farms. Safety in such places might have been guaranteed by the most prominent families in the neighbourhood, who also benefited from taxes on vessels landing at the place. Such harbour sites in Estonia were signalled in coastal landscapes by frequently conspicuous stone graves, where most probably the members of the family controlling the site were buried.¹²⁶ The use of stone graves is a means of marking harbours in the landscape in pre-state society, which can be compared to the custom of building early (Romanesque) churches or chapels at similar sites in the Christian world.¹²⁷ Some harbour sites excavated on Saaremaa or on the northern coast of Estonia have been surrounded by abundant graves and cemeteries, suggesting that these sites did not always function as trade or fishing centres but also as ritual centres, places of regular meetings for rites and negotiations.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Lang 2004.

¹²⁶ Mägi 2004b:140–142; for a similar phenomenon e.g. on Gotland see Carlsson 1991.

¹²⁷ Ulriksen 1998; Carlsson 1999.

¹²⁸ Mägi 2009b, 2010b.

Some harbour sites on Saaremaa, starting from about the 6th century, can be viewed as good examples. Among those that have been excavated during the last decades, Tornimäe harbour site on the eastern coast of Saaremaa could be interpreted as a central harbour at district level, owing to its location close to one of the biggest hill-forts on the islands, as well as to the intensive and widespread occupation layer.¹²⁹ A probable Migration Period harbour site Paemõis ("Limestone Manor"), excavated in 2003, was situated on the banks of the Maadevahe River, at the time of its use about 1 km upstream. It was separated from the surrounding area by a low wall.¹³⁰ From a somewhat later period, the Viking Age and late prehistoric river harbour at Pälla on southern Saaremaa functioned as a trade or war harbour for a more limited area, and Viltina further along the same coast was a partly ritual, partly secular assembly site probably serving several political districts (Figure 3.8.).¹³¹



FIGURE 3.8. *Finds from the harbour site at Viltina, 7th century (TLU AI 6503: 11, 22, 399, 13, 24, 20, 22, 114, 17, 36, 9, 15).*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.

¹²⁹ Mägi 2010b.

¹³⁰ Mägi & Mägi 2002.

¹³¹ Mägi 2010b.

Some prehistoric harbour sites have been located, but not extensively excavated, along the Couronian coast. Lithuanian archaeologist Žulkus has suggested that late Viking Age *emporium*, or, as he calls them, remote transit and trade centres, existed in Linkuhnen,¹³² Palanga, Klaipėda, Eketė, and Zlėkas Priednieki. Some of them, he believes, acquired the attributes of early urban places.¹³³ Of the above-mentioned places, Eketė, Linkuhnen and Zlėkas Priednieki are in fact located several tens of kilometres from the sea-coast, and can therefore not be interpreted as sea harbours. The *emporium* seem to be only theoretically located though, since no archaeological evidence, except for the site of Palanga, has been presented in publications.

Žulkus has also drawn attention to changes in topography along the Couronian coast since the Viking Age. The changes have been considerable, although the land mass upheaval that caused the alteration in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic coastline was not significant in the southern half. Žulkus reports several lagoons along the Couronian coast, in addition to the present ones, in the Viking Age. One big lagoon reached from Grobiņa down to Šventoj north of Palanga, and Žulkus believes that an important trade centre could have been situated here near present-day Šventoj. He claims that the presence of foreign merchants near Šventoj and Palanga is proved by some archaeological evidence (see Section 7.5.). The River Šventoj was, according to him, an important trade route, despite its small size.¹³⁴

The site of Palanga north of Klaipėda serves, according to Žulkus, as a good example of Couronian late prehistoric trade harbours. The complex has also been excavated. It consisted of four settlements and a small (later) hill-fort; the latter probably functioned as a cult-site in the 10th–13th centuries. Some of the settlements yielded finds from the Viking Age or even earlier periods. Žulkus suggested that the site had started as a trade centre as early as the 10th century, and functioned as a transit place for international trade with bronze, silver, salt, amber, and “traditional Baltic commodities”. So-called Baltic Sea ceramics found on the site, together with perhaps some other, unpublished finds, indicated connections with southern Scandinavia and Hedeby.¹³⁵

An important trade centre is believed to have situated at Kaup-Wiskiauten¹³⁶ in Sambia, in the present-day Kaliningrad Oblast of Russia. Like Grobiņa, the

132 Now Rzhevskoe in the Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia.

133 Žulkus & Bertašius 2009; Žulkus 2011.

134 Žulkus 2003.

135 Žulkus 1997: 330–344; 2004: 239–240.

136 The present, Russian name for the village Wiskiauten is Mohovoe. Kaup is the local name for a little forest, and is believed, because of its old Germanic meaning, to refer to the trading place.

site is defined as a Scandinavian colony entirely because of abundant Scandinavian evidence in a cemetery, found in both male and female graves, and dated from the 9th to the early 11th centuries. Other graves in the vicinity, however, demonstrate entirely local material from the Stone Age to the Middle Ages. No settlement where Scandinavian colonists lived is recorded in the neighbourhood so far, neither is there any hill-fort known in the vicinity. Recent research has yielded material in settlement layers in different places close to the graves, but no Scandinavian material or anything else linked to international trade has so far been unearthed.¹³⁷

Kaup-Wiskiauten is normally connected with the Amber Way from south-eastern Baltic coastal areas along the River Vistula down to southern Europe and Byzantium, where it effectively replaced the earlier centre Grobiņa, which was abandoned by the Scandinavians in the early 9th century.¹³⁸ At approximately the same time, Scandinavian settlers started to bury their dead in the Kaup-Wiskiauten cemetery. The paramount nodal point on the Amber Way was probably Truso at the Vistula Lagoon, where the River Nemunas also debouched up till about 1000 AD.¹³⁹

The trade centre at Truso¹⁴⁰ appeared in the 8th century, and flourished especially during the 9th and 10th centuries. This *emporium* at the border between what can be considered the Eastern Baltic and the Southern Baltic has provided much clearer archaeological evidence than any other place described above in this text. The settlement of 15 hectares was surrounded by a semi-circular rampart, inside which a number of houses built on a regular plan were excavated. Finds indicated the presence of several types of handicraft, as well as trade, and were frequently of Scandinavian character.¹⁴¹

Although not interpreted as such by local archaeologists, some settlements along the lower reaches of the Daugava River, in the Livic area, should also be mentioned here (see in more detail Section 7.4.2.). Several settlements on the northern bank of the river were large, up to 10 ha in area, and sometimes revealed wooden fortifications along the bank. In Mārtiņsala, for instance, the settlement had an earth rampart along the riverbank, and the landward side of it was enclosed by a wooden fence. In the Salaspils complex, two 4–5 ha settlements covered a stretch of about 1 km along the river-bank, and between them was a cemetery. Buildings within these dwelling sites, mainly pit-houses,

137 Žulkus & Bertašius 2009.

138 Kulakov 1994: 113–123.

139 Žulkus & Bertašius 2009.

140 Present-day Janów Pomorski in the north-eastern end of Poland. The name Truso was first mentioned by Wulfstan in the 880s.

141 Bogucki 2004.

were arranged regularly, in parallel rows along streets that were laid out at an oblique angle to the river.¹⁴² Quite a number of finds in the settlements indicated different handicrafts.¹⁴³

These Livic settlements were located in the vicinity of the large trade centre Daugmale on the opposite bank of the river, and this can presumably explain the fortifications, their layout, and their size. Most probably the villages were participating in trade along the River Daugava, and could house an increasing population during trade seasons. As is indicated in the big cemeteries nearby, the villages probably hosted an ethnically varied population (see Sections 2.3.2. and 7.4.3.). Most of these sites, however, are not accessible anymore, because of the power station damming that flooded these areas.

In the late 1980s a settlement site near the medieval castle at Hämeenlinna in central Finland, next to an inland water route, was interpreted as a trade centre by the archaeologists who excavated it. It was said to have covered an area of at least 5.5 ha, surrounded by a fence, and dated to the 3rd–13th centuries. Crafts that had once been practised in that place were indicated by bronze and iron slag, metal-working tools, as well as finds connected with textile crafts and the making of glass beads. Agriculture had not been practised there, although a large number of cereal grains were unearthed.¹⁴⁴ However, other Finnish archaeologists have strongly suspected such an interpretation.¹⁴⁵

3.5 Different Modes of Communication in the Eastern Baltic

Differences in natural conditions in the northern and southern halves of the Eastern Baltic, as described above in this text, may point to considerable differences in the ways that overseas communication functioned. Put briefly, the very indented and well-guarded coastline in the northern part probably encouraged more peaceful, treaty-based communication, while plundering and military attacks were easier on the straight coast of the southern half. Nevertheless, opposite possibilities were certainly present in both cases as well.

As for international trade routes, the northern half of the Eastern Baltic held a more advantageous position. Sailors bound for the *Austrvegr* probably preferred the routes along the Finnish and Estonian coasts or along central Estonian rivers and wetlands; travelling through the areas of present-day Latvia and Lithuania was presumably considered mainly when the destination

¹⁴² Ciglis *et al.* 2001: 47–48.

¹⁴³ Šnē 1997.

¹⁴⁴ Schulz & Schulz 1990.

¹⁴⁵ Taavitsainen 1990: 166–167; 2005.

was the Principedom of Kiev or, further away, Byzantium. Even in this case, the most prominent route was probably the River Daugava. The Livs inhabiting the lower reaches of this river belonged together culturally with the northern, rather than the southern half of the Eastern Baltic, apart from the fact that the entrance to the river was closed by straits that could easily be controlled by the inhabitants of Saaremaa and northern Couronia. In addition, alternative routes towards Byzantium ran through Novgorod or Pskov.

3.5.1 *Culture Contacts and Colonisation*

British archaeologist Chris Gosden has tried to categorise cultural contacts and colonialism in prehistory; these two concepts are often not possible to differentiate, especially when we have in the main only material evidence available. According to the model presented by Gosden, three categories of colonialism can be observed, interpreting the material world as it represents human relationships. However, he has also warned against taking his categories as something fixed and stable; instead, they can easily overlap or exist together within one culture.¹⁴⁶

The category of *the middle ground colonialism* characterises, according to Gosden, a situation where all parties believed that they were in control. There was hardly any acculturation, but new modes of difference were often created, frequently using material culture for this purpose. A sort of alliance between the newcomers and the locals was normally constructed, based on mutual dependency, which allowed the newcomers to live in a new social and physical landscape. Simply put, this system enabled the existence of two cultures side by side, without any demand for acculturation from one side. The system could, however, alter social relations from both sides.¹⁴⁷

The category *colonialism within shared cultural milieu* is particularly difficult to distinguish from cultural contacts. In this system, new forms of social and cultural capital could be seen as novel sets of resources by the local elite, the non-elite being excluded from the new cultural network, thus creating new forms of inequality. Acculturation processes from both sides played an essential role, and the system was characterised by the polyglot and hybrid nature of cultures. Links were between elites rather than other social groups. Material culture often played a paramount role in these processes and there was often a “symbolic centre” of material culture, but not all elite items need emanate from this centre, being largely produced outside it. The system of shared cultural milieu can, according to Gosden, be best seen as “colonialism without

146 Gosden 2004: 40.

147 Gosden 2004: 26–32.

colonies”, and was often driven by trade. Relations between incomers and natives might have been extremely complex, with mutual influence on both sides, which enables Gosden to see colonialism with shared cultural values as “...a socially complex and mobile world, with frequent exchanges and forms of identity which were fluid rather than fixed”.¹⁴⁸

There was also the third category, called *Terra nullius* by Gosden. It included lack of recognition of prior ways of life, destruction of social relations, and, first of all, killing people. Although such a pattern certainly characterised individual Viking raids, it hardly dominated communication between Scandinavians, early *Rus'*, and East-Baltic people. The first two categories, on the other hand, appropriately describe the differences between cultural contacts between the northern and southern half of the Eastern Baltic.

3.5.2 *Sphere of Shared Cultural Values in the Northern Half of the Baltic Sea*

The importance of internationally relevant communication routes in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, as well as the control that locals could easily exercise over the very indented coast, presumably meant that merchants travelling to the east had a great interest in good relationships with the locals. The interest was probably mutual, since friendly foreign travellers promised profit from transit charges. However, generally peaceful communication did by no means exclude raids by Scandinavian Vikings on the eastern coasts (or raids in the other direction); part of more densely populated coastal areas on Saaremaa and north Estonia, whose prosperity was partly a result of their beneficial geo-political position on the route, probably attracted a number of Viking chiefs. In everyday life, one may presume, contacts based on treaties and personal relationships nevertheless prevailed.

As was demonstrated above, the importance of trade in prehistory has been traditionally under- rather than overestimated in both Estonian and Finnish archaeology, although these countries' location on trade routes has been accepted by most archaeologists. Arguments based on more theoretical constructions and, for instance, the construction of cultural landscapes, have however not been particularly widespread.

The latter is well demonstrated in comparatively recent works of some Estonian archaeologists. Tvauri, who has written about prehistoric Tartu, has taken the view that, contrary to widespread opinion, trade played only a marginal role in the economy of late prehistoric Estonia. He did not believe in the trade route along the central Estonian river-system, since he did not see proof enough for

¹⁴⁸ Gosden 2004: 26, 39–81.

it, and especially because no trade centre had been recorded archaeologically in the marshy areas around present-day Pärnu. He also argued that the upper classes of Novgorod were probably not interested in one more trade route through the area of present Estonia.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the emergence of trade routes cannot be defined only through “the interests” of the towns in Kiev-Rus. Neither have cultural geographical aspects of the location of Tartu been considered by Tvauri in his argument.

The importance for international trade of waterways consisting of smaller rivers has been highlighted by Estonian numismatists, notably Kiudsoo and Leimus. In particular, they have defined the early Viking Age hill-fort and settlement complex in Rõuge in south-east Estonia as a trade centre, but Kiudsoo has also emphasised the importance of the trade route along the large lakes between present-day Estonia and Russia, as well as the importance of the Emajõgi River.¹⁵⁰ His argument is predominantly based on silver hoards and coin-finds. He points to the considerable number of such finds along the River Emajõgi, which is in sharp contrast to the few finds of the same sort along the River Daugava.¹⁵¹ Leimus, although he recognises the abundance of silver hoards in Estonia, still believes that the local inhabitants only played a passive role in international communications.¹⁵²

Without writing much about trade or trade routes, Valter Lang has put forward the idea that no Viking Age trade centres can be found in present-day Estonia, because no Scandinavian colonisation or culture tradition can be detected there.¹⁵³ What he meant by “Scandinavian culture tradition”, however, remained unspecified, especially considering the extraordinarily strong Scandinavian influences in some parts of the material culture (see later in this text). Iru was not considered by him to have been a trade centre, but a kind of focus for settlement from villages around, which lasted for some centuries.¹⁵⁴ The emergence of early urban centres appeared some centuries later, and was, according to Lang, evident in large late prehistoric-early medieval hill-forts like Varbola or Soontagana.¹⁵⁵

The present author has a somewhat different point of view, as already indicated above. The great resemblance between Viking Age artefacts found in Middle Sweden, Gotland, and Estonian and Livic as well as Finnish and

149 Tvauri 2001: 191–193, 208–212.

150 Leimus & Kiudsoo 2004.

151 Kiudsoo 2013.

152 Leimus 2006.

153 Lang 2004.

154 Lang 1996: 476–477.

155 Lang 2004.

Karelian coastal areas, indicates a sphere of shared cultural values as categorised by Gosden. In artefact material it is demonstrated, above all, in weapons, jewellery, and accessories associated with the male sphere, but it is also obvious, although to a lesser extent, in some female ornaments in certain places, e.g. in local types of oval brooches in Livic and Karelian areas. It is also the same region where Scandinavian animal styles were widespread, also connected almost entirely with male attributes. Since the second half of the Viking Age, at the latest, local animal art variants had developed and existed together with “pure” styles, especially in the coastal zones in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic (see also Sections 6.2.7. and 7.2.3.).¹⁵⁶

Archaeologist and art historian Indrek Jets, who has studied Scandinavian ornamental styles in the eastern areas, has expressed the opinion that the adaptation of Scandinavian styles only in the ornaments connected with local warrior activity indicated affiliation with the warrior class in Middle Sweden and Gotland. Similar and similarly decorated weapons, ornaments, and belts acted as a means of demonstrating togetherness, the shared ideology of warriors, and probably also shared myths, epics, and values. He finds this impossible without intense peaceful connections in the form of personal friendships, service under chieftains in another area, the fostering of each other’s children, and perhaps mixed marriages.¹⁵⁷

Mixed marriages could, however, have been hampered by what were presumably different social systems, and especially by a possible matrilineal system of descent. On the other hand, these differences could easily explain the conspicuous shortage of Scandinavian female jewellery, especially in Estonia, which is in obvious contrast with the similarity in male artefacts.

No Scandinavian colonies or cemeteries with Scandinavian grave goods have so far been recorded in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic. In male graves, however, the deceased’s region of origin can probably not be detected owing to the artefactual similarity with other areas within the shared cultural sphere. That sort of archaeological material fits perfectly with the category of colonialism within shared cultural milieu differentiated by Gosden, who had emphasised the form of “colonialism without colonies” as particularly characteristic of such systems.¹⁵⁸

Gosden has also written about a “symbolic centre” for such cultural contacts; the nascent Svea kingdom in Middle Sweden might have played this role for the northern Eastern Baltic in the Viking Age. Contrary to what was believed

¹⁵⁶ Jets 2012.

¹⁵⁷ Jets 2013: 266.

¹⁵⁸ Gosden 2004: 39–40.

earlier in the 20th century, artefacts indicating cultural togetherness do not need to be produced in the centre; there could be quite large-scale production of such items in peripheral areas. Even the styles themselves were often not developed in the symbolic centre. Many of the items exchanged in such a system were the “luxuries”, the consumption of which was essential to people both in the central and peripheral areas.¹⁵⁹ Cristina Creutz’ study of pattern-welded spearheads, which proved to have been produced largely in the Eastern Baltic, although they followed “Scandinavian” forms and decoration, can serve here as a good example.¹⁶⁰ Jets’ research on ornamental styles and patterns on particular artefacts has come to the same conclusion.¹⁶¹

Comparison of other cultures in the world has demonstrated that systems of shared cultural values often relied on long-distance communication and existing patterns of exchange. Although the system is mainly based on the adaptation of material culture and styles, the movement of people themselves within such cultural spheres may also have had an influence.¹⁶² Similarly, the possibility that some Scandinavians from present-day Sweden migrated to the Eastern Baltic areas or *vice versa* is a probability, even without forming clear colonies or clusters of foreign settlement.

Callmer has emphasised the complications of following internal migrations within shared cultural spheres – just because of the nature of such a form of communication, it can easily remain invisible in archaeological evidence. In particular, the migration of socially and economically incomplete groups, as individual merchants or warriors, or peasants with their household, could result in a very rapid assimilation into the local culture, thus “disappearing” quickly from archaeological evidence.¹⁶³ It is obvious that shared values expressed in material culture, as in male graves in the cultural sphere around the northern half of the Baltic, do not provide archaeologists with any way of assessing ethnicity, based simply on material culture remains. As a matter of fact, the current way of tracing possible immigrations depends on the evidence of female attributes, despite the probability that it was mainly men who travelled.

3.5.3 *The Middle Ground in the Southern Half of the Eastern Baltic*

Several researchers in the southern half of the Eastern Baltic have emphasised intense cultural contacts with Scandinavians, explaining them by both trade

159 Gosden 2004: 39–40.

160 Creutz 2003.

161 Jets 2013.

162 Gosden 2004: 53–71.

163 Callmer 2000: 8–9.

and military activities. These interpretations seem to rely on written sources in most cases; since place names that are believed to mark certain Baltic districts are mentioned, contacts are believed to have been there, even if they have not left archaeologically visible traces.

As demonstrated above, there is a clear tendency to see early urban centres in nearly all bigger settlements next to hill-forts in the southern half of the Eastern Baltic, and interpret some of them as important nodal points on international communication routes. Although it can be entirely a question of variable interpretations, it is possible that the character of central places, including putative trade centres, really differed from those further north.

The large settlements beside several Latvian and Lithuanian hill-forts can possibly be linked with a more hierarchical social order in these areas, especially in cases when the locations of such centres do not support their interpretation as important nodal points of international trade. It is more convincing to consider them political and administrative centres, an idea which is supported by the written sources of the 13th century describing them as residences of local princes. The rise of early urban centres as well as the higher percentage of luxury artefacts among trade goods characterise deeply hierarchical societies, particularly in developing or already established kingdoms. It is also true for the Eastern Baltic where early urban centres seem to have developed more frequently in areas where the social system is believed to have been more hierarchical.

Communication between Scandinavians and Couronians has recently been discussed by Audronė Bliujienė. She stressed that the most frequent connections with Scandinavians were, according to written sources, by Sambians, Couronians, and Semgallians.¹⁶⁴ However, she could not help admitting that the amount of Scandinavian imports in these areas is surprisingly small. Bliujienė believed that the absence of Scandinavian evidence supported the idea that Germanic styles in their original form were not understandable to Baltic people. Balts liked to create their own ornament versions, though adapting some foreign prototypes to the Baltic taste.¹⁶⁵ Other researchers, notably Vidas Žulkus and Vladimir Kulakov, have agreed, explaining that bronze and silver artefacts of Scandinavian origin, mainly acquired in plundering raids to Scandinavia, might have simply been re-cast to conform to local artefact types.¹⁶⁶ None of these archaeologists seem to question the existence of

¹⁶⁴ Bliujienė 2006, with references to Mickevičius 2004; Žulkus 2004: 142–144.

¹⁶⁵ Bliujienė 2006: 189.

¹⁶⁶ Kulakov 1999; Žulkus 2011.

intensive contacts with Scandinavia, instead offering explanations for why it cannot be proved.

The only Scandinavian colonies in the Eastern Baltic are nevertheless known exactly in these areas, although the artefactual influence from Scandinavia seems to be minimal outside the immediate vicinity of these colonies. Geography suggests that southern Scandinavians, from present-day Denmark and south Sweden, were probably more active on the coast of the southern half of the Eastern Baltic. Still, we have to keep in mind other characteristics differentiating the ethnic Baltic areas from the northern half of the region. First of all, the only internationally important trade route through these areas was probably the Amber Route along the coast to the mouth of the Vistula. The straight coastline made it possible to approach the land undetected, while the consolidation of wealth based on good arable lands and a more deeply stratified society might have attracted marauding groups in Viking raids. Communication with Scandinavians was presumably arranged differently here than in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic.

The category of “middle ground colonisation”, as distinguished by Gosden, fits the situation in the southern half of the Eastern Baltic region. Characteristically for this mode of cultural contacts, colonies or settlement clusters can exist among the local population, without considerable acculturation from either side. The evidence of Grobiņa, Kaup-Wiskiauten, Linkuhnen, and probably also Truso seems to support this categorisation – these were all colonies with a number of Scandinavian settlers, who nevertheless seem to have had only a modest cultural impact on the surrounding areas. These colonies existed as separated cultural clusters for several centuries, before they were probably assimilated into the local milieu.

Gosden has pointed out that the development of middle ground colonisation can take different forms. It can lead to cultural or even physical destruction of the surrounding natives, i.e. the *Terra nullius* type of colonialism, but can also lead to the creation of a working relationship between incomers and locals, forming a new way of living. However, the middle ground colonies can also simply disintegrate in the flux of time.¹⁶⁷ The latter seems to be the case for Scandinavian colonies in the southern half of the Eastern Baltic, but also for similar colonies in present-day Russia, where Scandinavian clusters suddenly disappeared around 1000 AD.

In the “middle ground” set-up it did not have to be the power and values of the colonizers that dominated, although some cultural influence could certainly take place. The term “middle ground” denotes the part of colonialism

167 Gosden 2004: 82–113.

that did not involve acculturation, which is in accordance with the shortage of Scandinavian evidence outside the colonies in the southern Eastern Baltic. An almost similar pattern of development can be seen in the emergence of Russia, where a few colonies of Scandinavians resulted, in cooperation with other influential factors, in the emergence of an original Russian cultural sphere. The colonies themselves, together with the middle grounds they had once formed, disintegrated in the course of these processes. Although elements of Scandinavia-rooted Rus culture lived on in the new combination, they were so totally intermingled with other and more local features that one can hardly compare them with the Scandinavian culture of the following centuries.

The idea presented by some Lithuanian and Russian archaeologists about Scandinavian-style silver and bronze artefacts being re-cast in the areas of ethnic Balts may have some truth in it, although it is difficult to prove. The evidence suggests in any case that the locals in the southern half of the Eastern Baltic lands were not particularly eager to adapt Scandinavian elements in their own culture, even if these Scandinavians lived right next door.¹⁶⁸ It was probably a well-established system of mutual dependence, based on agreement not to interfere with each other's activities, where neither of the parties can be seen as supreme.

Middle ground colonisation certainly assumes the presence of newcomers; still, its social complexity might have been greatly different from that in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic. Particularly complex social groups can be seen within such colonies. In the Viking world, it might have firstly meant migration of certain chieftains together with their family members, retainers, and all their households, being perhaps followed by smaller households dependent on these chieftains. Such complex groups communicated within the group itself, or with selected elite households from the locals, and probably much less with the local population in general. As a result, it might have taken several generations to integrate, or the newcomers' group might have simply left the colony at some point.¹⁶⁹

3.6 Conclusions

As demonstrated above, we can talk of two different kinds of communication in the Eastern Baltic lands in general, although additional differences certainly existed between individual districts. Such variability was patterned by social

¹⁶⁸ See also Virse & Ritums 2012.

¹⁶⁹ See also Callmer 2000.

and topographic conditions in different parts of the area; other, less tangible characteristics of culture can also be sensed behind these variables. This diversity must be kept in mind when we are trying to reconstruct prehistoric communication between the east and the west.

Societies with corporate power organisations in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic seem to have benefited from the most convenient waterways running through their areas, whose importance must have increased abruptly at the beginning of the Viking Age. Connections with eastern Scandinavians, who were becoming increasingly interested in trade routes and power relations in the east, seem to have been in many ways peaceful, based on shared cultural values and expressions. This mode of cultural contact can be complicated to follow up in archaeological evidence, hindered primarily by the similar material culture used to express this togetherness. The sense of unity seemed however not to reach further than the military upper-class sphere, leaving the female sphere of these cultures virtually untouched.

The more peaceful character of communication could rely on the combination of essential trade routes and indented and well-controlled coastlines. Merchants who had to sail through waters where their vessels could be observed from a densely populated coast more or less all the way, presumably preferred making peaceful treaties rather than trying their luck. Although Viking raids to these coasts were commonplace, too, as will be demonstrated in later chapters, the system of treaties and personal relationships was probably the one most beneficial for both parties.

More hierarchical societies in the southern half of the Eastern Baltic had their communication with surrounding powers built up in different ways. Contacts between representatives of upper social strata were presumably those that dominated peaceful means of communication. A social structure that resembled that in Viking Age Scandinavia and Kiev-Rus made it easier to understand each other's values and position in society. Densely populated areas and consolidation of power and values in a number of central places attracted merchants to sell their goods to these markets, as well as plundering groups who hoped for abundant booty.

Since few internationally relevant trade routes crossed these areas, the demand for guaranteeing safe passage with treaties was probably much smaller than can be assumed for the northern half of the Eastern Baltic. It was possible to sail along the Couronian coast remaining out of sight from the land, if this was the intention; when approaching with the objective of plundering, the Vikings could sail quite close to the coast before they could be observed. The location of most local hill-forts tens of kilometres from the coast can be considered a consequence of the danger from the sea.

In the light of this it should be quite predictable that written sources, which tend to talk more of bellicose activity than peaceful trade, frequently mentioned southern districts of the Eastern Baltic. Place names given in these sources might however have changed their meaning in different periods, and the importance of both districts and communication routes varied from time to time. These aspects will be considered more closely in the following chapters.

The Historical Reality: Places, Place Names, and Ethnonyms in Written Sources

Written sources dealing with Viking Age eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea are scarce, and this is especially true for sources contemporary with the period. Sources considered in this chapter have a clearly different character, written down in different periods and in different regions of the old world.¹

Only some individual writings referred to here were actually written down by people who lived in the Viking Age. Such are, for instance, the description of Wulfstan's voyage and Rimbert's chronicle, both created in the 9th century, but far from the Eastern Baltic. These narratives can be qualified as overviews of areas that the writers knew only vaguely or where they had never been themselves. In connection to the problem concerning the earliest meaning of *Rus'*, the works of several Islamic or Jewish writers can be pointed out as similar source material. These represented views from remote countries and were based heavily on rumours and clichés, even though many of them were written in the 9th–11th centuries.

The earliest Scandinavian written sources about the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea are runic stones, the majority dated to the 11th century. These are laconic, concrete texts that include valuable information on persons, events, or places in this particular period. The texts are, at the same time, very short and can often be read in various ways. The information yielded from the runic stones has, therefore, most value when including other sources – e.g. saga narratives or archaeological evidence – in the analysis.

Another source material partly contemporary with the events described in them is skaldic poetry, preserved for us mainly as additions to the prose texts of sagas. Most scholars believe that these verses had also undergone oral transmission processes before they were written down. Still, the core, or at least certain elements, of these poems has normally been considered comparatively stable.² Whenever the eastern coasts of the Baltic were mentioned in the skaldic poetry, the information is short and poetic, and can mainly be interpreted with the help of the prose text of the saga itself.

1 For different written sources about the Eastern Baltic, also see Stylegar 2016.

2 Sigurðsson 2004: 16–17, 123–128.

Longer and more detailed descriptions of the eastern coasts of the sea can be found in Nordic sagas that were predominantly written down in Iceland and mainly in the 13th–14th centuries. There are different opinions about the reliability of sagas as historical accounts. In earlier research, texts of the sagas were often equated with historical reality; later, several archaeologists and historians dealing with the Viking Age completely rejected the sagas as untrustworthy sources. The most widespread opinion seems to be, however, that these are not authentic stories of Viking Age people, but narratives that have been orally passed down through generations and partly probably just created by the medieval writers themselves.³ Information given in sagas should, therefore, be treated cautiously, realising that these stories predominantly reflect attitudes and understandings in medieval Iceland and not in Viking Age Scandinavia.

The attitude supported in this book is that the texts of sagas include elements that may have survived through oral tradition and may have been built upon historical facts; however, the form in which they are transmitted to us has been shaped by multiple storytellers or writers, who all contributed with attitudes and views held in their own times. Facts in the sagas may or may not be trusted, and the greatest challenge is often sorting out the possible “core” of these stories. It is impossible to point out any kind of “original” story, since most sagas were presumably built upon different narratives of the oral lore.⁴ According to their subject and reliability, the Nordic sagas can also be divided into different groups (see Section 4.2.).

The first nine books of *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus seem to a certain degree to be based on similar narratives and motifs to those found in the Icelandic sagas. Saxo himself declared in the preface to his book that he had “...composed a considerable part of this present work by copying their [the Icelanders’] narratives...”⁵ Still, characters in Saxo’s stories tend to be named differently than in the Nordic sagas, and a clear distinction in the use of place names can also be observed. These stories were, however, also greatly based on oral tradition that had been passed down through generations before Saxo, in which information about the Viking Age and even earlier centuries can be carefully sorted out.

The other books of Saxo’s work as well as several 13th-century chronicles, first of all the chronicle of Henry the Livonian, include generally quite reliable data that frequently were based on the writer’s personal experience.

3 Sigurðsson 2004: 6–10.

4 Good examples how to treat different elements in sagas, see e.g. Sigurðsson 2004: 211–245.

5 Saxo Grammaticus, preface.4. See also Sigurðsson 2004: 3–4; Hall 2005.

These chronicles can certainly be of great help in the recognition of medieval attitudes. However, as demonstrated later in this book, it is not justified to use the 13th-century chronicles for the reconstruction of Viking Age circumstances in the Eastern Baltic.

In addition to those mentioned, another sort of written source used in this book is the Russian chronicles. The earliest of them, *Nestor's Chronicle*, was written down at the beginning of the 12th century, thus nearly a century after the end of the Viking Age. In the Russian chronicles, happenings in particular years were given very laconically, using only a sentence or two. Essential events of the 9th–11th centuries were reconstructed only later, and were presumably greatly based on oral tradition and seen through the prism of medieval attitudes. Earlier data given in the Russian chronicles should, therefore, be treated similarly to the Nordic saga literature, with the recognition that most of them have probably undergone a longer or shorter transmission period.

In approaching the situation in the Viking Age and even later, it is important to interpret place names appearing in the few written documents dealing with such early ages in the North. Even if places with the same name still exist, and the interpretation of names in medieval sagas or chronicles therefore seems to be above suspicion, it is seldom so simple. Personal names and place names are considered the details of orally transferred stories that are most liable to be altered.⁶ It often makes their accuracy most suspicious, especially in the sagas and the first parts of some chronicles that were presumably built upon oral lore. On the other hand, the frequent alteration of place names when transferring a story orally does not automatically mean that the names necessarily were changed.

A good example in the region in question is offered by Novgorod, which is mentioned under this name (meaning “the New Town/Castle”) in several Russian chronicles. Chroniclers writing in the early 12th century at the earliest simply projected their contemporary situation back to the Viking Age, assuming that the earlier trade centre on the Volkhov River must have been the same as in their time, i.e. Novgorod. In reality, Novgorod did not exist so early, and the place mentioned was actually what is later known as Gorodishche, Scandinavian *Hólmgarðr*, 2 km away from medieval Novgorod on an islet between rivers and marshy areas in the outlet of the River Volkhov to Lake Ilmen. The earlier trade centre was later for some time in use as the residence of the Novgorodian prince. *Hólmgarðr*, on the other hand, was from the 11th century onwards applied to Novgorod.⁷

6 Sigurðsson 2004: 27.

7 Nosov *et al.* 2005: 31–32.

A similar drift of names may have occurred in other Kiev-Rus places, for instance in Polotsk, which was first mentioned in 862 but according to archaeological evidence was not founded until the 10th century. The earlier centre in Polotsk must have been fabricated by chronicle writers, using their own knowledge. The only place that comes under question in Polotsk in the 9th century is a settlement site in the general neighbourhood of medieval Polotsk, archaeologically proved to have been in use from the 8th to the 10th centuries.⁸

Turning back to the Eastern Baltic, names of whole districts may have moved in the flux of time, thus potentially causing much more serious misunderstandings than just some few miles. The use and interconnection of the names Couronia (*Kúrland*), Estonia (*Estland*), and Sambia/Semgallia (*Samland*, *Semland*, *Simkala*, *Sembia*) are prime examples. In prehistoric times Estonia possibly meant all lands on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, from time to time perhaps predominantly their southern half, and in the 13th century was clearly limited to approximately the area of present day Estonia. From the medieval period up to the beginning of the 20th century, however, only the northern mainland part of the present country was called Estonia.⁹

Earliest names for the eastern part of the Baltic Sea demonstrate great variability, as well as diversity in how they were used in different times and sources. The character of the Eastern Baltic coast as a buffer zone between two cultural areas, overlapping with cultures on both sides, is quite understandable, and is also mirrored in the names that these districts have been called, or with which affiliations they have been viewed.

4.1 Estland(s) in the East

The toponym *Estland*/*Eistland* was used with both broader and narrower meanings, dependent on the background of the writer and the period when the name was mentioned. Its meaning is connected with Old Scandinavian *eist*, *austr* (the east), and in sagas it normally forms part of *Austrvegr*, or, in its broader meaning, can even be identical with the latter.¹⁰

When the term *Aesti* was first used by Tacitus in the 1st century AD, he referred to the gathering of amber as one of the main characteristics of the people

8 Ereemeev 2012.

9 Still, the ethnic term Estonians was used for all people speaking different dialects of Estonian, as well as for those living in Livonia.

10 Similarly to the name of Norway (Jackson 2012: 654–655).

in question.¹¹ Amber can be found most extensively in the present-day Kaliningrad oblast; however, its distribution area has moved in the course of time, and there is some evidence that in certain periods, e.g. in the Bronze Age, amber was also found in quite large quantities along the other parts of the Couronian coast, as well as on the Estonian island of Saaremaa.¹² Audronė Bliujienė has pointed out that from the early Bronze Age to the late Roman period, thus including the time when Tacitus wrote his book, few amber artefacts were found on what is the present-day Lithuanian coast, compared with neighbouring areas.¹³ Viewed from so far away as from the Roman Empire, the gathering of amber could without doubt be considered as the most relevant characteristic describing different peoples living on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Indirectly, the ethnic variability is emphasised by Tacitus himself, by using a plural form – *Aestiorum gentes* (*Aestian* tribes).

That the name *Aestland*/*Estland*, or the mentioning of a tribe called *Aesti*/*Esti*, should in these early sources be considered a geographic term, and not directly connected with ethnicity, is also indicated in later writings. In the centuries just before the Viking Age, when in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic the shared cultural milieu with eastern Scandinavia became obvious and the use of the trade route along the Finnish Gulf intensified, it would be hard to believe that the area of present-day Estonia had no name. Toponyms and ethnonyms written down in documents could hardly have applied only to the southern half of the region. Even more, the fact that only a few centuries later the name *Estland* had been narrowed down to simply the northern part of the Eastern Baltic, could rather hint that this was some kind of “core area” of the earlier, obscure *Estland*-name.

To judge from the most confusing mid-6th-century European geography by Jordanes, the only known tribe on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea were the *Aesti*. Although for him the southern part of the Eastern Baltic might already have been somewhat more familiar than the north, the extent of their “lands”, or lands of other “tribes” remain unknown:¹⁴

11 Tacitus, 45.

12 Ots 2012.

13 Bliujienė 2011: 20. Bliujienė, like most Lithuanian archaeologists, equates *Aesti* directly with the ethnic Balts, and even chooses to use this ethnonym instead of “the Balts”, when talking of prehistory in Lithuania (Bliujienė 2011). Some Lithuanian and Polish archaeologists have, however, suggested that the name applied to the whole Eastern Baltic (Banytė-Rowell & Bitner-Wróblewska 2005). The same is believed by several Estonian historians (Palmaru 1980).

14 Jordanes, v:36, 120.

But on the shore of Ocean, where the floods of the river Vistula empty from three mouths, the *Vidivarii* dwell, a people gathered out of various tribes. Beyond them the *Aesti*, a completely peaceful folk, likewise hold the shore of Ocean [*Aesti tenent, pacatum hominum genus omnino*].

[Ermanaric, the king of the Goths] ... also subdued by his wisdom and might the race of the *Aesti*, who dwell on the farthest shore of the German Ocean [the Baltic Sea], and ruled all the nations of Scythia and Germany like his own domestic establishments.

As an example of geographic knowledge some centuries later, Einhard, the biographer of Charlemagne, wrote in the first decades of the 800s:¹⁵

A gulf [the Baltic Sea] of unknown length, but nowhere more than a hundred miles wide, and in many parts narrower, stretches off towards the east from the Western Ocean. Many tribes have settlements on its shores; the Danes and Swedes, whom we call Northmen, on the northern shore and all the adjacent islands; but the southern shore is inhabited by the *Slava* and the *Aisti*; and various other tribes...

The points of the compass, as often in these early descriptions, do not fit with the reality; medieval charts often show the east where the north should be.¹⁶ Einhard's note should therefore be understood as meaning that Swedes and Danes dominated on the western side of the Baltic, while Slavs and *Aisti* were the best known "tribes" on the eastern.

The last mention of *Estland*, which, somewhat surprisingly, still seems to apply predominantly to the southern half of the Eastern Baltic, can be dated to the end of the 9th century. *Eastlande* was mentioned in the description of Wulfstan's voyage, and has normally been believed to have covered the area inhabited by the Prussians on the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea.¹⁷ Still, the *Witland* district with several *Est*-place names, described in Wulfstan's document, was not claimed to have been a part of *Eastlande*, but belonging (or being subject) to the *Ests*,¹⁸ thus indirectly referring to the old meaning of *Eastlande* as a larger category. The ethnographic description of *Eastlande* that follows is stylistically different, and was probably added to the manuscript later. It may,

¹⁵ Einhard, 12.

¹⁶ Adam of Bremen, 4; footnote 33.

¹⁷ Bately 2009; Lübke 2009; Urbańczyk 2009.

¹⁸ Bately 2009.

or may not, describe the area of the Prussians, but more likely the description depicted some other part of *Eastlande*, or even *Eastlande* in general.

The above-mentioned *Estland* is very large, and there is very many a town [or stronghold], and in each town there is a king. And there is very much honey and fishing, and the king and the most powerful men drink mare's milk and the poor and the slaves drink mead. There is very much conflict between them. And there is not any ale brewed amongst the *Ests*, but there is mead enough.

And there is among the *Ests* a custom, when a man is dead there, that he lies indoors uncremated with his kinsmen and friends for a month and sometimes two, and the kings and the other high-ranking men as much longer as they have more wealth, [so it is] sometimes for a half a year that they are uncremated and lie above ground in their houses. And all the time that the body is indoors, there has to be drinking and entertainment, until the day that they cremate him.¹⁹

Then the same day that they wish to carry him to the funeral pyre, they then divide up his property [or money], what there is left over after the drinking and the entertainment, into five or six parts, sometimes into more, according to the amount of property there is ... [followed by a description of a sort of horse-race for getting parts of the property]

... And when his wealth is thus all spent, then he is carried out and cremated with his weapons and clothing ... And that is a custom among the *Ests* that people of every nationality must be cremated there, and if a single bone is found unburnt there, they must atone for it greatly.

And there is among the *Ests* a people who are able to cause coldness, and that is why the dead men lie there so long and do not decompose, because they bring about the coldness on him. And also two vessels full of ale or water should be set down, they bring it about that one of them is frozen over, whether it is summer or winter.²⁰

The characteristics of *Eastlande* in this description are probably the observations of some outsider, mixed with rumours and clichés about faraway countries. Several characteristics can apply to both later Prussia and Estonia (hill-forts, lack of central power, honey and fishing, cremation as the dominant burial custom). Especially the burial rites describing secondary burial and the sharing of the dead man's property in many respects fit better with the

19 Bately 2009; Jesch 2009.

20 Text from Bately 2009.

society further north. First of all, the remark about using cold temperatures is more appropriate to northern areas. In Prussia the archaeological material seems to indicate a strictly hierarchical social structure, with chieftains' graves abundant in grave goods (see Section 2.4.), while on Estonian islands special funeral houses with mixed bones, indicating secondary burial, were common until the 7th century or later. Cremation became, at least in coastal Estonia and the islands, dominant immediately before the Viking Age, while at least in some cases not bodies but bones seem to have been cremated, indicating the persistence of the secondary burial custom.

The late 9th or early 10th century, when the account of Wulfstan's journey was composed, was the time when trade towards the east through present-day northern Russia was intensive, and the flow of Kufic coins at its height. This line of communication ran predominantly through the northern part of the Eastern Baltic, and was probably the time when the toponym *Estland* started to denote only this part of the eastern coast of the sea. Wulfstan's report can, therefore, be seen as the last testimony of the earlier broad meaning of the name *Estland*. The ethnographic description, added to the text later, could very likely already point to approximately the area of present-day Estonia – not as the name was generally understood in Wulfstan's time.

Other 9th–10th-century writings, e.g. Rimbert's chronicle, do not treat a land or region called *Estland*, although this toponym often appears in Scandinavian sagas (see topic 4.2.). The latter were, however, written down at least two centuries later. The next geographical text mentioning *Estland* is produced by Adam of Bremen only in the late 11th century.

By Adam's time, the vision of the Eastern Baltic had become more complex, at least it consisted now of three islands: *Aestland*, *Churland*, and *Semland*. They were all described as being the subjects of Sweden – “There also are other more distant islands [in addition to islands in present-day Sweden, Denmark and Germany, described as belonging to Denmark] that are subject to the authority of the Swedes”.²¹ The geographic relatedness or location of these islands, however, remains obscure and their descriptions seem to consist of clichés repeating each other. It is hard to believe that the scholar himself really knew the actual situation, but rather was repeating rumours heard of these faraway areas. *Aestland* is the northernmost of these islands:²²

We were told, moreover, that there are in this sea many other islands, of which a large one is called *Aestland*. It is not smaller than the one of

²¹ Adam of Bremen, 4:16.

²² Adam of Bremen, 4:17.

which we have previously spoken [i.e. *Chourland*]. Its people, too, are utterly ignorant of the God of the Christians. They worship dragons and birds and also sacrifice to them live men whom they buy from the merchants. These men are carefully inspected all over to see that they are without a bodily defect on account of which, they say, the dragons would reject them. This island is said, indeed, to be very near the land of women, because the one referred to before is not far from *Birca* of the Swedes.

More detailed description of the Gulf of Finland was given some paragraphs before:²³

...live the Goths in an extensive domain reaching to *Birca*. After that the Swedes rule over a spacious region extending to the land of women. Beyond them [eastwards?], as far as Russia [*Ruzzia*], are said to live the *Wizzi*, *Mirri*, *Lamiy*, *Scuti* and *Turci*. In this area that sea [the Baltic Sea] again comes to an end...

Although Finns, too, were twice mentioned by Adam, their area seems to have been too far away from Bremen, and was more or less overlapping with the mythical Land of Women, a description of which can also be found in the chronicle.

Late-11th-century Couronia was described by Adam of Bremen as follows:²⁴

Of these islands (under the dominion of the Swedes) the largest, the one called *Churland*, takes eight days to traverse. The people, exceedingly bloodthirsty because of their stubborn devotion to idolatry, are shunned by everybody. Gold is very plentiful there, the horses are of the best; all the houses are full of pagan soothsayers, diviners, and necromancers, who are even arrayed in a monastic habit. Oracular responses are sought there from all parts of the world, especially by Spaniards and Greeks. This island, we believe, is called *Chori* in the *Vita* of Saint Ansgar, and the Swedes at that time subjected it to tribute. A church has now been built there through the zeal of a merchant whom the king of the Danes moved to do this by many gifts ... The king himself, rejoicing in the Lord, recited this canticle for me.

²³ Adam of Bremen, 4:14.

²⁴ Adam of Bremen, 4:16.

The author seems, however, to have been rather confused by the exact location of *Churland*, as can be hinted by his remark that he believed *Churland* to be the same as Rimbert's *Chori*. Behind the mention that Spaniards and Greeks (thus people with whom Adam himself probably had only minimal contact) visit oracles of Couronia, he probably concealed the fact that he personally did not know of people consulting the oracles.

Adam of Bremen's knowledge of *Semland* seems to have been much better than of *Churland*, if not to say more personal. He was however somewhat confused by the fact that people in *Semland*, or some of the people there, were called Prussians. Whether this referred to different ethnicities remains unknown, but possible. In other sources, the ethnonym Prussians (*precun*) appeared first as early as the 9th century.²⁵ In the middle of the 10th century, the Jewish merchant Ibrāhīm Ibn Ya'qūb knew only Prussians along the Baltic Sea as the neighbours of Poles. His Prussians had their own language, and were raided by *Rūs* in ships from the west. Beyond the Prussians came only the City of Women.²⁶

Semland, where the *Sembi* and/or *Pruzzi* lived, was considered by Adam of Bremen to have been an island linked with islands in the western end of the Baltic Sea. This may simply indicate that Adam's knowledge of *Semland* was better than that of *Aestland* or *Churland*, but is nevertheless somewhat contradictory with his earlier statement, according to which *Semland* belonged to the Swedish dominion together with these two:²⁷

Of the islands that lie near the Slavs, we understand that three are of considerable importance ... [followed by the description of probably the islands of Fehmarn and Lolland in present-day Germany and Denmark] ... The third island, that called *Semland*, is close to the Russians and Poles. It is inhabited by the *Sembi* or Prussians [*Sembi vel Pruzzi*], a most humane people, who go out to help those who are in peril at sea or who are attacked by pirates. Gold and silver they hold in very slight esteem. They have an abundance of strange furs, the odour of which has inoculated our world with the deadly poison of pride. But these furs they regard, indeed, as dung, to our shame, I believe, for rightly or wrongly we hanker after a marten skin robe as much as for supreme happiness. Therefore, they offer their very precious marten furs for the woollen garments called *faldones*.

²⁵ Mugurēvičs 2000.

²⁶ Ibn Ya'qūb, see Ibn Fadlān *et al.*, 166.

²⁷ Adam of Bremen, 4:18.

Many praiseworthy things could be said about these peoples with respect to their morals, if only they had the faith of Christ whose missionaries they cruelly persecute. At their hands Adalbert, the illustrious bishop of the Bohemians, was crowned with martyrdom. Although they share everything else with our people, they prohibit only, to this very day indeed, access to their groves and springs which, they aver, are polluted by the entry of Christians.

They take the meat of their draft animals for food and use their milk and blood as drink ... These men are blue of colour, ruddy of face, and long-haired. Living, moreover, in inaccessible swamps, they will not endure a master among them.

Better knowledge of *Semland* is, in Adam of Bremen's chronicle, also indicated by the frequency with which he mentions this land or its inhabitants. *Semland*, *Sembi*, or *Pruzzi* were mentioned five times, *Aestland* or its inhabitants twice, and *Chourland* only once. The impression is that *Semland* was known by Adam as a broader district, probably the same as *Aestland* earlier – the depiction of *Sembi* and *Pruzzi* as most helpful peoples resembles that of *Aesti* in earlier sources, which is hardly coincidental.

Samland or *Semland* occurs also in other sources and is traditionally believed to have applied to Samland/Sambia on the Prussian coast, where a peninsula of Sambia, in German *Samland* still exists. Still, in a few cases the name has also been believed to apply to Semgallia (Latvian *Zemgale*) between present-day Latvia and Lithuania.²⁸ According to some etymologists, the name *Zemgale* is however connected with the Latvian word *ziemeļi* (north), and thus just indicates a northern district.²⁹

The next to present a geographic description of the area was al-Idrīsī, a 12th-century Muslim geographer from Sicily.³⁰ Northern Europe, a faraway quarter in his world, was probably described with the help of some informant from Jutland; at least this part of Denmark was described in a much more detailed way than the surrounding areas (see in more detail Sections 7.6.2.–7.6.3.). The description covered from Sweden and the town of Sigtuna to Finland and probably Åland. From there on it proceeded to what is called *Astalānda*, probably applying to present-day Estonia and the Livic area in Latvia. He also mentioned the land of *al-Māġūs*, fire-worshippers, right next to *Astalānda*,

28 Mickevičius 1994; Tarvel 1994; Mugurevičs 2000.

29 Ageeva 1990: 53 and references.

30 Birkeland 1954: 67–75; Leimus 1997; Vostochnye istochniki, 127–137.

presumably some ethnic Baltic areas, through which one could reach Russia. The description of *Astalānda* was however more detailed than the part of al-Idrīsī's writing that probably applied to Sweden, thus indirectly indicating the relevance of these Eastern Baltic areas to medieval trade.

4.2 Pre-viking and Viking Age Eastern Baltic in Scandinavian Sources

The eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea are frequently mentioned in Nordic sagas and skaldic poetry, but in most cases only briefly. Still, there are exceptions, and *Garðaríki* in particular has drawn more attention than most. Skaldic poetry survived only as parts of sagas, and the sagas were mainly written down from the late 12th to the 14th centuries, accordingly, in the time of Christianity. One can assume that the world view and geographical knowledge of those who finally wrote down these stories were hardly typical for the time when most of the narratives were created and transmitted orally.

As for the Eastern Baltic, the so-called kings' sagas (*Konungasögur*), Icelanders' sagas (*Íslendinga sögur*), and legendary sagas (*Formaldarsögur*) should be mentioned. As can be understood from the name, the kings' sagas focus on the history of royal dynasties, and their activity embraced wide areas, including the eastern coast of the Baltic. The Icelanders' sagas, which mainly deal with events and happenings of leading families in late Viking Age Iceland, describe activities outside Scandinavia considerably less often. Actions described in these two sorts of sagas are normally considered comparatively trustworthy, except in the earliest parts of the kings' sagas (see the beginning of this chapter).

The legendary sagas, on the other hand, have little value as historical sources; they were more likely considered entertainment. Legendary sagas used in this text are, for instance, *Göngu-Hrólfs Saga* and *Örvar Odd's Saga*. Their activity takes place in several areas of Scandinavia, but very often also in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea, in *Garðaríki*, or *Bjarmaland*. There are often fabulous adventures and mythological elements, such as monsters, dwarves, talking animals, or magic swords in these sagas.³¹

Several researchers believe, however, that sagas, including the legendary sagas, can contain some tradition that has survived orally from pre-Christian times, even though one cannot believe the *fabulae* as such.³² The same point of view has also been supported in this book. As an example, one can argue

31 E.g. Langeslag 2015: 183–184.

32 Sigurðsson 2004; somewhat more sceptical view e.g. Schjødt 2009.

that numerous raids to *Garðaríki* or *Bjarmaland* described in some legendary sagas, as well as several small kings and kingdoms there, may reflect pre-Viking or early Viking Age reality and built upon oral tradition that was born in these times. At the same time, it is very difficult to believe that any of the persons or events in these sagas really existed in the same way as described in these narratives. In a similar manner, adventures of particular Scandinavians in the east that, according to some sagas, happened in the 10th or 11th century, probably never took place exactly the same way as written down in the Middle Ages. The stories can, however, repeat some pre-Christian oral lore, include details that survived from one storyteller to another, and thus be a more or less adequate reflection of Viking Age reality. The challenge is to try to sort out such details, as well as indicate other elements that mirror perhaps much later attitudes.

Some researchers have questioned, quite persuasively, entertainment as the assumed primary function of the legendary sagas. The authors of the written sagas usually remain anonymous, and instead emphasise “sources” that they have used to compile their works. In all probability, medieval listeners also perceived the sagas as “real” history.³³ The medieval perception of what is history was different from that of later times. The history writers omitted passages of old texts which had lost their meaning, as well as elaborating other parts that seemed relevant to them, in order to create a more intelligible text for their audiences.³⁴ For 13th–14th-century Icelanders, many phenomena that might have been seemed incredible in their own time or in their own country were considered trustworthy in faraway countries and in faraway times.

It has often been pointed out that most of the stories in the legendary sagas seem to depict semi-mythical times before the settlement of Iceland. Iceland was not central in these narratives, as it tended to be in other sagas. As for the legendary sagas depicting areas in the east, the context of the stories fits well with the circumstances of the 7th–9th centuries, as we know it from archaeological sources and as is described in the chapters of this book. The attitude supported here is, therefore, that at least part of the legendary sagas was once compiled using myths and narratives from the 7th–9th centuries, or sometimes from even earlier times. Despite the obscure details in the actual stories, these narratives may, accordingly, indirectly reflect pre-Viking and early Viking Age knowledge of the world. Several motifs of the legendary sagas can also be recognised in the first nine chapters in Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum*, which probably depend, in a broader sense, upon similar oral tradition.³⁵

33 O'Connor 2005.

34 Orning 2015.

35 Friis-Jensen 2009; Jensson 2009.

Considering the sagas in the context of the subject here, it is mainly the general geopolitical knowledge of the eastern coast of the Baltic, place names, districts, and the character of the activity that was described as taking place there that draw attention, especially in comparison with the stories in the kings' or Icelanders' sagas. Looking at these aspects, the legendary sagas have been used surprisingly little. However, differentiating the Icelandic sources according to the probable time of activity there, a quite considerable variability of toponyms and the frequency of their use becomes apparent, nor is it possible to overlook the alteration of attitudes towards the inhabitants on the eastern coast.

Before going deeper into the discussion about the development of toponyms in the eastern Baltic and present-day north-west Russia, it is relevant here to recall briefly the archaeological situation in the northern Baltic Rim (see Chapters 2 and 3). Especially in the eastern part of this area, the distinctive nature of coastal culture, compared with that of inland areas, strikes the eye. Viking Age evidence in inland and coastal Estonia demonstrates considerable differences in artefactual culture,³⁶ making it hard to believe that either these peoples themselves, or their contemporary neighbours, considered them one people.

Coastal Estonia and the western and south-western coasts of Finland (including the Åland archipelago), as well as Livic areas in present-day Latvia, Karelia, and certain areas on the coast of the eastern end of the Finnish Gulf and Lake Ladoga, as well as Gotland and central Sweden, on the other hand, demonstrated an archaeologically very homogeneous warrior culture, which can be observed as early as the 7th–8th centuries. In some cases, especially in the Livic area and Karelia, it also embraced the female sphere, while it was less obvious in female artefactual culture in the other areas mentioned above.³⁷ As for warriors, we are not dealing here simply with points of intensive contact, but with a common understanding of culture, similar expression of virtues and values, use of similar weapons, ornaments, and accessories as mediators. As was shown in Chapter 3, such cultural unity can be categorised as a shared cultural milieu.

Originally Scandinavian artefact types, ornament styles, grave forms, but presumably also attitudes, stories, and legends, were taken over in these neighbouring coastal zones, adapted in local culture, and developed further locally.

³⁶ See also Tvauri 2012: 321–325.

³⁷ It should be mentioned here that the use of metal detectors during the last decades has also yielded a rapidly increasing amount of Scandinavian female ornaments found in, for instance, Estonia.

Local variants in the shared cultural sphere impacted on one another, as well as back to the centre, thus developing the unity even further. This was a multi-ethnic, mainly Eastern Scandinavian – Baltic-Finnic-based milieu, where, however, the means of expression were borrowed from Sweden, and where self-identity probably relied greatly on Scandinavian values. The latter suggests that the *lingua franca* used in this milieu was presumably the eastern dialect of Old Norse, or perhaps a kind of pidgin Scandinavian based on Old Norse and Baltic Finnic.

4.2.1 *Austrvegr and Garðaríki*

The eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, particularly the areas around the Gulf of Finland, is in saga literature most often referred to in the legendary sagas. In several cases, the activity of a saga took place entirely in the east, especially in *Garðaríki* or *Austrvegr*. The latter is probably the most frequently used geographical term in this context, together with its variations *Austrríki* (eastern states) or *Austurlöndi* (eastern countries). Particularly *Austrríki* and *Austurlöndi* seem to have been very flexible terms in a geographic sense. There is no doubt that present-day Estonia, Latvia, and north-west Russia belonged to *Austrríki*; still, in some stories it is possible to find, for instance, *Tatariland* (the southern areas of present-day Russia and Ukraine) under the same toponym.³⁸

In most cases *Austrvegr* or *Austrríki*, however, applied only to the areas where Scandinavian adventurers were active. The period 600–900 that probably set the frames for the scene of some legendary sagas was the very same period when the Scandinavian-dominated network in the east took shape. The process is obvious in the stories. There were multiple petty kingdoms in *Austrvegr*, ruled by “kings” with Old Norse-sounding names, but completely unknown from other sources. These kings were constantly challenged by other Vikings, and rotated very often. In several stories, particularly in those called “romantic sagas”, Vikings fought for the hand of *Austrvegr* or *Garðaríki* princesses. However, they married the daughters of former kings in nearly all cases, even without a romantic background.³⁹ Despite the at first glimpse fabulous motif, one can also sense the early Viking Age situation here: marriage with local chieftain's daughter or widow is a widespread means of legitimising the new power in a colonised country. Still, in some narratives, queens of *Garðaríki* were said to have originated from one or another district in Scandinavia as well.⁴⁰

38 Göngu-Hrolfs Saga, 17.

39 The Saga of Halfdan, 24.

40 The Saga of Halfdan, 2.

According to *Ynglinga Saga* the Swedish King Ivar Vidfamne "...subdued all of Sweden. He also had possession of all *Danaveldi* [the Danish realm] and a large part of *Saxland*, all of *Austrríki* and a fifth of England".⁴¹ The *Saga of King Heidrek* tells that the same Ivar had "...conquered also *Danaveldi* and *Kúrland*, *Saxland* and *Estland*, and all the eastern realms as far as the confines of *Garðaríki*".⁴² Here it seems that *Kúrland* and *Estland* remain outside *Garðaríki*, but inside *Austrríki*. The sons of Ragnar Lodbrok shared the domains of their father so that each of them got one share: *Svealand*, Denmark, *Austrríki*, or England.⁴³ Such a division of lands has quite a mythological character, but can still hint at how the size and importance of these dominions were evaluated.

Many sagas, both earlier and later, mention Viking raids to *Austrvegr*, mainly without specifying the exact area. In most cases, such specification would probably have been pointless, since such raids lasted a whole summer, while the Vikings were constantly moving from one place to another along the coast.⁴⁴ In autumn the plunderers returned to Scandinavia or their dominion in *Garðaríki*, most frequently to *Aldeigjuborg* (Staraya Ladoga). Halfdan the Viking king of *Aldeigjuborg*, for example, spent his summers ravaging in *Austrvegr*.⁴⁵ Another Viking Framar plundered in *Austrvegr* the whole summer, and reached *Aldeigjuborg* in the autumn, with all his ships.⁴⁶ Quite often trading activities to or through *Austrvegr* were also mentioned,⁴⁷ as well as the mixture of trade and plundering.⁴⁸

Plundering in the Baltic Rim was however not confined only to *Austrvegr*, but other coasts were constantly under the same threat. Characteristic for the time was the story of 12-year-old Eirik Bloodaxe in about 900, when "King Harald [his father] gave him five warships, and he went raiding, first in *Austrvegr*; then south around Denmark and about *Frísland* and *Saxland*; and he was four years on this expedition".⁴⁹ In the late 10th century the Icelandic Viking Egil, after he had plundered in *Courland* and liberated the Dane Aki, who had been a slave there, used Aki's knowledge to plunder everywhere along

41 The Saga of the Ynglings, 41.

42 The Saga of King Heidrek, 59–60.

43 The Saga of King Heidrek, 59–60.

44 E.g. Egils saga Einhenda, 10; The Saga of Halfdan, 1; Saint Ólaf's Saga, 52; The Saga of Sturlaug, 4.

45 The Saga of Halfdan, 10.

46 The Saga of Sturlaug, 24.

47 Bjarnar Saga, 4; Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 221; Flateyjarbók; Landnámabók, 55; Morkinskinna, 2; Saint Ólaf's Saga, 64.

48 Egil's Saga, 46.

49 The Saga of Harald Fairhair, 32.

the Danish coasts. Later, when Thorolf and Egil planned to sail for *Austrvegr* again, they changed their mind and harried in Jutland instead.⁵⁰ Another example from the beginning of the 11th century was Ólaf Haraldson, the future king of Norway, who, also aged 12, started his career by marauding along the Swedish coasts.⁵¹

Not all these expeditions had happy endings, at least when looked at from the story-teller's side.⁵² The best-known examples of failed eastern raids are the death of King Yngvar in a place called *at Steini* in Estonia, or the story of Hvidserk, the son of Ragnar Lodbrok who allegedly inherited *Austrríki*, but then arranged plundering raids there and was killed.⁵³ Viking raids could bring in wealth and reputation, or more or less fail, ending with little booty or none.⁵⁴

Nordic sagas were written from the Scandinavian point of view, depicting deeds and adventures of Scandinavian heroes, whether they were then kings or commoners. Much less often the sagas talked about how Scandinavians' own coasts were plundered by outsiders. Still, there are some references to such events. The unsuccessful raid of the pre-Viking period semi-mythological King Yngvar of Sweden to *Estland* was inspired by the fact that "...before his time there had been many incursions made in Sweden [*Svearíki*], both by Danes and hordes from *Austrvegr*".⁵⁵ The demand made by Swedish peasants to reconquer lands in *Austrvegr*, stated in a *Thing* in Uppsala in the early 11th century, could easily have been inspired by plundering groups arriving from there. In the 1040s, at least, King Magnus complained in England, how Denmark "...is much exposed to incursions of the Wends [*Vindi*], Kurlanders [*Kuri*] and other tribes along the Baltic, as well as of Saxons".⁵⁶

In the majority of sagas where events probably happened earlier, *Garðaríki* appeared as belonging in *Austrvegr*; these two names were presumably also used in parallel, denoting approximately the same area.⁵⁷ In any case, the only way to *Garðaríki* ran through *Austrvegr*. It is striking, however, that the toponym *Garðaríki* was almost never used in Snorri's *Ynglinga Saga*, except in its purely mythological part, where Odin travelled with his people from *Asgaard* via *Garðaríki* to *Saxland*.⁵⁸ When, according to the *Ynglinga Saga*,

50 Egil's Saga, 46, 49.

51 Saint Ólaf's Saga, 4.

52 E.g. Göngu-Hrólfr's Saga, 38.

53 Ragnars Saga, 18; The Saga of Harald Fairhair, 32, 33.

54 Egil's Saga, 19, 36.

55 The Saga of the Ynglings, 32.

56 The Saga of Magnús the Good, 23; see longer citation in Section 7.1.2.

57 E.g. The Saga of Halfdan, 11.

58 The Saga of the Ynglings, 5.

King Yngvar undertook a Viking raid to *Austrvegr*, he sailed more specifically to *Estland*, and the dominion of King Hvidserk was also called *Austrríki*, not *Garðaríki*. *Bjarmaland* was not named in the *Ynglinga Saga* either, although in other legendary sagas *Bjarmaland* appeared as one of the main targets for the Vikings in their hunt for treasures in the east.

It is likely that more than other sagas in *Heimskringla* the narratives in *Ynglinga Saga* were based on stories or poetry that described times when Scandinavians were not yet very active on the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea – that is, the centuries before the Viking Age. This idea is supported by some researchers who suggest that the structure of *Ynglinga Saga* better resembles that of the legendary sagas than that of the other sagas in *Heimskringla*.⁵⁹

4.2.2 Garðaríki, Hólmgarðaríki, Rússía

In several legendary sagas, the difference between the later Novgorodian land – *Garðaríki* – and the core areas of later Kiev-Rus was pointed out. Heroes in the *Saga of Halfdan* pretended to be survivors from a shipwreck and in *Aldeigjuborg* – which, according to the narrative, was in *Garðaríki* – claimed that they originated from *Rússía*.⁶⁰ In *Egils saga Einhenda* *Rússía* was located between *Garðaríki* and *Húnaland* (the country of Huns).⁶¹

The toponym *Rússía* or Russia was probably added to the narratives only later, in the 13th–14th centuries, when the majority of the legendary sagas were written down. Several other stories of the components of *Garðaríki*, or narratives where the name *Garðaríki* was used interchangeably with *Hólmgarðaríki*, these terms indicating presumably the same area, probably relied on old oral tradition. In the beginning of the *Saga of Göngu-Hrólf* it was specified that King Hreggvidr reigned in “...*Hólmgarðaríki*, which some people call *Garðaríki*”.⁶² It is worth noticing that such a *-ríki* variant was formed only from *Hólmgarðr*, while a *Kænugarðaríki* (Kiev-state) never appears in the sagas.⁶³

The confusion over geographic terms in the *Saga of Göngu-Hrólf* was further expressed in the description of *Garðaríki* given later in the text. The explanation, however, seems to have been added by the 13th–14th-century writer, as it partly reflected the geopolitical reality of this time.⁶⁴

59 Jørgensen 2009; see also Mundal 2009.

60 The *Saga of Halfdan*, 7.

61 *Egils saga Einhenda*, 1.

62 *Göngu-Hrólfs Saga*, 1.

63 *Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki*, 277.

64 *Göngu-Hrólfs Saga*, 38; translated by the author from Russian, *Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki*, 285.

One third of *Garðaríki* is known *Kænugardar* and it borders on the mountain range which separates *Jötunheim* from *Holmgardaríki*.⁶⁵ There is also *Ermland* and other small countries are thereabouts too.

The paragraph varied in different manuscripts. Manuscript B, for instance, stated in addition, that “There are situated many small states in *Hólmgarðaborg*, where the main residence of the King of *Garðar* is, and what now is called *Nogarðar*”, and in manuscript C it was said: “There are situated *Livland* and several other small states in *Hólmgarðaborg* that now is called *Nogarðar* and *Rudzaland*”.⁶⁶ Similar manipulation of toponyms is apparent, for instance, in the *Saga of Halfdan*, where quite unexpectedly an additional Viking trip was undertaken to *Bjarmaland* when the narrative was actually already finished. The place names now used were, however, no longer *Aldeigjuborg* and (*Hólm*) *garðaríki*, but *Nogarðar* and *Russlandi*.⁶⁷

One more Viking king in *Aldeigjuborg*, Halfdan, divided his dominions between his companions, providing us with an indirect allusion to which areas were considered to belong to *Garðaríki* at its inception, thus presumably no later than in the early 9th century (Figure 4.1.). In addition to *Aldeigjuborg* we find here *Álaborg* (Lake Beloye?), *Bjarmaland* (around Lake Onega?), and *Kirjálabotn* (Karelian Isthmus?).⁶⁸ Other countries and areas, or petty “kingdoms” that were somehow connected with *Garðaríki*, are hinted at in a list of the countries from which warriors came to help Kvillánus, king of *Aldeigjuborg*: “...*Kirjálalandi* [Karelia] and *Rafestalandi* [Tavastland in present-day Finland?], *Refalandi* [Rävala in north Estonia], *Vírlandi* [Virumaa in north Estonia], *Estlandi* [Estonia], *Líflandi* [Livonia], *Vitlandi* [Prussia?], *Kúrlandi* [Couronia], *Lánlandi* [?],

65 The uplands of Tihvin and Vepsa, running in NE-SW direction, separate the Novgorodian land from eastern regions, where, according to the legendary sagas, semi-mythical *Jotunland* with its main centre *Álaborg* was probably situated. The *Álaborg* district embraces, according to these lines, the areas around the Lake Beloye. The Lake Beloye was also mentioned in the *Primary Chronicle* as one of the three very first residences of *Rus'* princes (see later in this Chapter), and *Alaborg* was in the sagas considered the second most important centre in *Garðaríki* after *Aldeigjuborg*. The uplands mentioned above reach as far as the Valdai Hills, a part of the Central-Russian Upland, which stretches into Ukraine, that is, the core areas of Kiev-Rus. The geographical knowledge offered in the *Saga of Göngu-Hrólfr* is, accordingly, surprisingly precise.

66 Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 285.

67 The Saga of Halfdan, 25.

68 The Saga of Halfdan, 24.

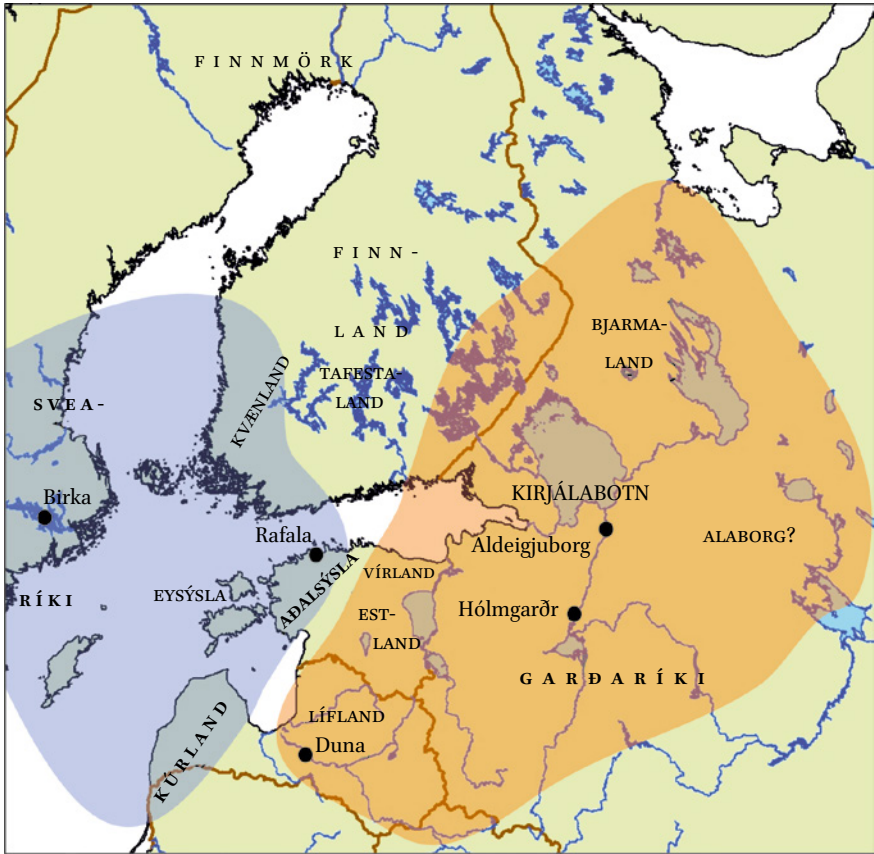


FIGURE 4.1. Place names mentioned in Nordic sagas and presumable dominions in early Viking Age. Blue marks the dominion of *Svearíki*, orange the dominion of *Garðaríki* in early Viking Age.

Ermlandi [district in Prussia?], and *Púlílandi* [Poland]”.⁶⁹ In the same saga another description of countries belonging to the *Garðaríki* can also be found, which, however, was presumably added to the narrative later: *Móramar* (Murom), *Ráðstofa* (Rostov), *Súrsdal* (Suzdal), *Hólmgarði*, *Palteskjuborg* (Polotsk), and

69 As for the southernmost countries, some exaggeration is nevertheless obvious in the list. Nearly the same list of countries, except *Vitlandi* and *Lánlandi*, is given in *Hauksbok*, and probably also functioned as a source for these sagas. There is also added after *Pulíland* “...*Vindland* [the Vending area] – [the latter] is the westernmost next to *Danmark* [Denmark]” (*Hauksbok*, 155).

Kænugörðum (Kiev). Kings of all these countries were supposed to have paid taxes to Kvillánus, the king of *Hólmgarðr*.⁷⁰

In sagas where the activity took place in the second half of the 10th or in the 11th century, the toponym *Garðaríki* clearly applied to Kiev-Rus. It was still considered a part of *Austrvegr*. For instance the merchant Gudleik, who because of his frequent journeys to *Garðaríki* had the nick-name *Garðske*, in the summer of 1017 went “...to *Austrvegr* to *Hólmgarðr*, and there bought splendid costly stuffs ... and also costly pelts and expensive tablecloth”, and turned back to Denmark in the autumn.⁷¹ Only two years before that, Earl Svein “... proceeded with his force east to *Garðaríki* [in another version: to *Austrvegr*] and harried there. He remained there during the summer, but when fall approached he returned to Sweden [*Svíþjóð*] with his troops”.⁷² This was the time when statehood was properly established in Kiev-Rus, which led to a change in Scandinavian-Russian relations, and was soon reflected in altered attitudes towards the eastern areas outside *Garðaríki*. This change of attitude can be seen, as demonstrated later, in both Scandinavian and Russian written sources.

It is difficult to estimate whether present-day Finland was considered to belong to *Austrvegr* or not. Since the easternmost parts of this country were probably believed to have belonged to *Garðaríki*, these areas obviously formed a part of *Austrríki* as well. On the other hand, Finnish place names in the sagas such as *Bálagarðssiða* or *Kven* were never directly connected with *Austrvegr*, and could belong to it only in a very broad interpretation. The clearly obvious cultural similarity, archaeologically, between Middle Sweden and the western and south-western coasts of Finland can be assumed to be based, at least according to written sources, more on social, cultural, and matrimonial connections than on communications reaching further east. Predominantly mythological references to Finland as a country of powerful sorcerers, such as appear in earlier Scandinavian sources, seem in any case to indicate the comparatively modest role that these eastern Finnish areas played in forming eastern networks. The network directed towards the north, especially connected with furs traded this way, was probably much more relevant for at least the central and coastal areas of present-day Finland.

70 Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 263–264; Örvar Odds saga, 30; about paying taxes to the king of *Holmgard* see also Göngu-Hrolfs Saga, 38.

71 Saint Óláf's Saga, 66.

72 Saint Óláf's Saga, 55.

4.2.3 *Viking Raids to Garðaríki*

In several narratives *Garðaríki* is very closely connected with maritime culture and activities, or is simply described in connections which in the Viking Age context were more applicable to some Eastern Baltic coastal areas than Russia as it existed after the turn of the millennium. The access from 11th–12th-century Russia to the Baltic Sea was quite complicated, and actually only possible along rivers that were difficult to navigate with sea-going vessels, demanding ships be frequently reloaded and dragged overland, if not a change of ship type. It is important to keep in mind that the south-eastern coast of the Gulf of Finland between present Estonia and the Karelian Isthmus was, and still is, a large wetland area that in the Viking Age was only sparsely populated. Therefore, the only outlet to the sea from *Hólmgarðr*/Novgorod was through the water route along Lake Ladoga and the River Neva, while Staraya Ladoga was probably the furthest place that could be reached directly with sea-faring ships.⁷³

It was not much easier to reach Pskov through the rivers and lakes between present-day Estonia and Russia. More than a hundred impassable rapids blocked the direct route to Polotsk along the River Daugava. In particular, plundering raids to what is the area of present-day Russia must have been very difficult to carry out in these conditions, although Scandinavian sources often mention such Viking-style ravaging expeditions, conducted by different sea-kings or Vikings, to *Garðaríki*.

When Viking raids to Baltic coasts were described in more detail in saga literature, it is revealed that the Vikings normally tried to stay close to their ships; after killing people, stealing movable valuables, and some cattle, they hurried back to their vessels and sailed away before the locals managed to collect their forces.⁷⁴ This activity was repeated along coasts or the banks of big rivers, spending nights on isolated islands or other safer places somewhat away from local habitation. Inland trips over several days were seldom conducted.⁷⁵ Although mythical sagas from earlier periods often mention real Viking navies consisting of 40–60, or even several hundred ships sailing to *Garðaríki* or *Bjarmaland*, these numbers were probably greatly exaggerated. Viking groups consisting of about 2–5 ships, as described in the more realistic Icelandic

73 The land mass around Novgorod and present-day St Petersburg is sinking at approximately the same speed as it is rising in Estonia, which means that north-west Russian rivers must clearly have been smaller in the Viking Age. There exists archaeological evidence that the water level in the River Volkhov in Novgorod, for instance, used to be 2 m lower in the 14th century than at present (Yevgeni Nosov, personal communication, August 2014).

74 E.g. *Göngu-Hrólfs Saga*, 1, 2, 28; *Saint Ólaf's Saga*, 4–8; *The Saga of Sturlaug*, 4, 27.

75 Rimbert, 30; *Egil's Saga*, 46.

sagas, are presumably much closer to the truth. Egil plundering in Couronia, for instance, only had one ship and 24 men,⁷⁶ Gunnar and Hallvadr marauded in *Austrvegr* with two ships.⁷⁷ These groups were vulnerable in a hostile land, where unexpectedness was their main means of obtaining booty. It is hard to believe that these robbing gangs deliberately put themselves in extra dangerous positions where their ships and booty had to be literally carried over rapids or watersheds, or when ships were situated several days' travel away, guarded by only some few warriors who were left behind.

In the pre-Viking and early Viking Age context, these plundering raids often reached as far as *Bjarmaland*, where extraordinary treasures, including several magic items, were believed to have awaited the Vikings. Most scholars currently believe that the term *Bjarmaland* was used for vast and vaguely identified areas in Northern Europe, populated mainly by Finnic-speaking people, which the Scandinavians reached mainly by the northern sea-route.⁷⁸ Especially this last identification seems to be primarily based on Othere's account from the late 9th century. In the legendary sagas, on the other hand, the Vikings travelled to *Bjarmaland* through *Austrriki*, that is, probably along the River Neva, Lakes Ladoga, and Onega, and along rivers around these lakes. These stories refer to *Bjarmaland* as an area comparatively close to *Hólmgarðr*, thus most likely denoting the Vepsa areas near and around Lake Onega.⁷⁹ That the term *Bjarmaland* had different, broader and narrower meanings, is also indicated by the mention of two *Bjarmalands* in some sources.⁸⁰

Turning back to the Finnish Gulf, there are several reasons to believe that by plundering in *Garðaríki* the stories that the sagas were built upon actually meant coastal areas in a broader sense than the Baltic coasts of present-day Russia. First of all, some coastal districts in the Eastern Baltic come under consideration,⁸¹ especially those regions that, at least in the 10th century,

76 Egil's Saga, 46.

77 The Story of Burnt Njal, 28–30.

78 Makarov 2007 with references.

79 See e.g. The Saga of Halfdan, 11, 15.

80 A History of Norway, 2:25–29.

81 The old name of *Garðaríki*, meaning approximately “the kingdom of towns”, need not necessarily refer to the hill-fort of Rurik's Gorodishche near Novgorod only. It also expresses perfectly the Viking Age reality – coming from Scandinavia, where intensively or permanently used early fortifications close to settlements were rare, the most striking peculiarity on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea was the abundance of fortifications. In the Viking Age they were generally not particularly strongly fortified, in most cases more like manors or small “towns” on top of some hill, surrounded by a wooden fence. Scandinavian “gard” was probably the best term describing them. As for earlier sagas, activities

presumably paid taxes to the Novgorodian princes, primarily the North Estonian coast (see Section 6.2.9.).⁸² It can also apply to some areas in the estuary of the River Daugava, especially if we bear in mind some obscure data about the kings of *Garðaríki* having subdued some areas there (see more detail in topic 4.2.7.),⁸³ or the fact that in the early 13th century the Livs in the estuary of that river paid taxes to the prince of Polotsk.⁸⁴

In the *Færeyinga Saga* there is a story of the Viking Sigmund, who in the 970s or 980s looted first in eastern Sweden, got much wealth and then "...sailed away from Sweden and held eastward to *Hólmgarðr*, and harried there round the islands and nesses...".⁸⁵ Only a few islands can be found along the Baltic coast of present-day Russia, which was in any case only sparsely populated, or along the straight north-eastern coast of Estonia, suggesting that the area that was pillaged lay probably in north-west or west Estonia. This is a coastal area with a heavily indented coastal line and a number of smaller and larger islands, the biggest of them Saaremaa and Hiiumaa. In several other Scandinavian sources, these districts were called *Eysýsla* and *Aðalsýsla*. It is possible, however, that, in the earlier form of this narrative, the area where Sigmund pillaged was called *Austrvegr*, which was replaced by *Hólmgarðr* by some later narrators.⁸⁶

This later transposition may especially be true, because in several other sources, also describing events in the late 10th century, *Eysýsla* and *Aðalsýsla* were treated as districts neighbouring *Hólmgarðr*.⁸⁷

In the following autumn, Earl Eirík returned to Sweden and remained there another winter (A.D. 997). But in spring the earl readied his force and sailed up *i Austrveg*. And when he came to the realm of King Valdemar he began to harry and to kill people, and to burn down everything where he went, thus laying the land waste. He reached *Aldeigjuborg* and beleaguered it until he conquered that town, killing many there, and breaking down and burning the entire town. Thereupon he went about *Garðaríki*, raiding far and wide ... Altogether, Earl Eirík was engaged in these

in *Garðaríki* or, for instance, *Bjarmaland*, quite often took place around or were somehow connected with strongholds.

82 A History of Norway, 19; The Saga of Óláf Tryggvason, 7; see also Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991.

83 Göngu-Hrólfs Saga, 1.

84 Henricus Lettus, 1: 3.

85 Færeyinga Saga, 19.

86 Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 177.

87 The Saga of Óláf Tryggvason, 90.

expeditions during five summers. When he left *Garðaríki* he raided throughout *Aðalsýsla* and *Eysýsla*, where he took four galleys from the Danes and killed all their crews...⁸⁸

However, the statement that Eirík was already pillaging before he reached *Aldeigjuborg*, suggests, for the reasons given above, that he first attacked northern Estonia.

Although not directly connected with plundering raids, it would seem that trade or some more personal means of communication along Finnish and Estonian coasts was hinted at in the story of Einar and Kalf, who came to *Svíþjóð* (overland from Norway), where they procured ships, with which they proceeded east to *Garðaríki* in the summer, and came in the autumn to *Algeidjuborg*.⁸⁹

That some part of Estonia was subject to taxation by the principedom of Novgorod in the 990s, is obvious from the *Saga of Óláf Tryggvason*, where Óláf's uncle came there to collect taxes and rents. In which part of the country this was, unfortunately remained unspecified (for more detail see Section 6.2.9.).⁹⁰

Some place names, especially in the legendary sagas, seem to have been changed by later story-tellers; for instance names that did not make any sense to listeners in later times could be replaced by more "familiar" names. In the *Saga of Sturlaug*, for instance, a Viking called Framar sailed to *Aldeigjuborg* with 60 ships and "...they set course for some islands which lay close by the shore. There Framar had them put up the awnings on their ships..."⁹¹ Since there are no islands near the lower reaches of the River Volhov in Lake Ladoga, let alone near Staraya Ladoga on the bank of the river, Framar's destination was probably something else in the original narratives. Islands suitable for a large fleet to settle down on, in the vicinity of some centre, can more probably be found along the northern coast of Estonia – e.g. near present-day Tallinn.

4.2.4 *Saxo's Mythical World*

When Saxo Grammaticus compiled the first nine chapters of his *Gesta Danorum* in the early 13th century, he partly used the same story tradition as Snorri and other Icelandic authors. These nine legendary chapters were added to Saxo's chronicle after the main corpus of his text was finished, and their mission was to present an overview of royal Danish genealogy. Narratives that seem to mainly describe the Viking Age context, were often attributed to

88 The story can also be found in *Bandadrápa* (*Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki*, 58–59).

89 Saint Óláf's Saga, 251.

90 A History of Norway, 19; The Saga of Óláf Tryggvason, 7.

91 The Saga of Sturlaug, 25.

heroic kings from an undefined past; first of all, the Danish legendary kings Haddings, Frode, Jarmerik, and Ragnar stand out because of their connections with the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. Saxo used old stories and sagas that in his time only existed in oral versions, compiling them into narratives along the lines that he himself preferred. Still, the attitudes and places presented in Saxo's mythical stories often resemble those that can be found in the Icelandic sagas, especially the legendary ones.⁹²

Unfortunately Saxo, who wrote in Latin, also translated all place names in a way that probably seemed the most logical to him. A good example is the name *Ruthenia*, which in Saxo's time had a clear meaning as the state of Russia. However, especially in the legendary part of his work, he probably simply replaced the old Scandinavian name *Garðaríki* with *Ruthenia* (Russia). As for the legendary part of Saxo's chronicle, it is even possible that original *Austrvegr* was replaced with the toponym *Ruthenia*, in much the same way that *Austrvegr* and *Garðaríki* were sometimes used interchangeably by Icelandic story-tellers.

In several cases *Ruthenia* was used to describe a Viking style maritime power, for instance "At that time Reth, a *Ruthenian* pirate, was devastating our homeland with barbarous pillage and violence".⁹³ Stories that in one part of Saxo's book took place in *Ruthenia*, were in another part described as happening in other areas. Thus Starkadr used wooden shoes against points spread on the ground first in *Ruthenia*, while later it turned out that this happened in *Curlandia*.⁹⁴ Locating the event in Couronia also sounds more logical, because it happened during a Viking raid, and thus probably in some coastal zone. *Hellespont*, normally described independently, and probably referring to the lower reaches of the Daugava River (with a prominent town called *Duna* in it),⁹⁵ seems to be located in *Ruthenia* in another part of the text.⁹⁶ It nevertheless appears logical when recalling that, according to some Icelandic legendary sagas, kings of *Garðaríki* possessed areas along the River Daugava.

The first of the Danish mythological kings to be militarily active in the east was, according to Saxo, called Haddings. He waged war against Lokero, king of the Couronians, as well as Handwanus, king of *Hellespont*, who resided within

92 Friis-Jensen 2009; Jensson 2009.

93 Saxo Grammaticus, 7.9.7.; see also 2.1.6.

94 Saxo Grammaticus, 6.5.9. and 8.8.9.

95 Saxo Grammaticus, 1.6.10.

96 Saxo Grammaticus, 9.4.32. The name "Russia" has also had a different meaning later. In 1188 Pope Clemens III confirmed the foundation of Yxkyl bishopric near Riga in the estuary of the River Daugava. The new bishopric was described as being situated in Russia (*in Ruthenia*) though (Selart 2002: 72 and references).

an impregnable defensive wall in his city *Duna*.⁹⁷ Haddings' son Frotho attacked Couronia again, and met a Russian (*Ruthenae*) chieftain Tranno with warships.⁹⁸ Later, he conquered several strongholds in *Ruthenia*, which he seemed to have reached with his fleet, and were therefore presumably situated somewhere on the present-day Latvian or Estonian coast (for greater detail see Chapter 6).⁹⁹

These stories include several fabulous details, and are often given as examples of the incredibility of *Gesta Danorum*'s first books.¹⁰⁰ Neither is anything known of the time of these adventures, but if something along these lines ever took place, it must have happened in the first half of the Viking Age, so most likely during the 9th or the first half of the 10th century.

Nevertheless, taking into account the archaeological evidence of the early Viking Age, and that the place names used in this period probably did not directly correspond to their use in later times, the core of these narratives often appears in a logical context (see e.g. 6.3.2.). The identity of Couronia and *Hellespont*, which in Saxo's narratives seem to have a closer connection than would be suggested from the geographical distance between (southern) Couronia and the River Daugava,¹⁰¹ is easily understandable if we assume that *Kúrland* in the early Viking Age might have embraced the Kurzeme peninsula together with the Island of Saaremaa. One cannot help noticing that Saaremaa or *Eysýsla*, quite a common Eastern Baltic toponym in the Icelandic sagas, was never mentioned by Saxo.

4.2.5 *Finland*

Although mentioned comparatively often, Finland appears in these Scandinavian narratives that probably rely on earlier sources mainly as a place where powerful sorcerers lived, perhaps based on the quite human fear of "the Other", in that case, witchcraft carried out in unusually cold weather conditions, in another language and lifestyle. However, exactly in which parts of present-day Finland these sorcerers were believed to have lived often remains unclear, since people called *Finni* could, in Scandinavian sagas, live both in Lapland and in the southern part of present-day Finland.¹⁰²

97 Saxo Grammaticus, 1.6.7–10.

98 Saxo Grammaticus, 2.1.4–6.

99 Saxo Grammaticus, 2.1.7–9.

100 Mickevičius 1994; Tarvel 1994.

101 See e.g. Mickevičius 1994.

102 Aalto 2014.

Still, at least in the 7th–9th centuries, marriage connections between Finnish and Swedish upper-class families seem to have been commonplace.¹⁰³

Vanlandi was the name of Sveigthir's son who succeeded him and ruled over the Uppsala crown goods. He was a great warrior and fared far and wide from country to country. He accepted an invitation to pass the winter in Finland with Snæ the Old, and there he married his daughter Drífa. But in the spring he departed, leaving Drífa behind. He promised to return after three years, but did not within ten years. Then Drífa sent for Huld, a sorceress, and sent Vísbur, her son by Vanlandi, to Sweden. Drífa prevailed upon Huld by gifts that she should conjure Vanlandi back to Finland or else kill him.

Vanlandi was then killed, and his and Drífa's son became the following king in Uppsala. It was only a few reigns later, however, that Finland was attacked by the Swedes again.¹⁰⁴

One summer King Agni proceeded to Finland with his fleet, landing and harrying there. The Finns collected a great force to oppose him. The name of their leader was Frost. A great battle ensued, and King Agni was victorious. Frosti and a great many others fell there. King Agni harried far and wide in Finland, subjecting it and making enormous booty. He took Skjálf, Frosti's daughter, prisoner and carried her away together with Logi, her brother. King Agni proceeded to marry Skjálf. She prayed the king to make a funeral feast for her father. So he invited many men of note and celebrated a great feast.

The story continued with a detailed description of how Skjálf managed to hang king Agni with his own golden chain, after which she sailed away together with her men.

Although Finland was mentioned several times in the *Ynglinga Saga*, the name seldom occurred in the legendary sagas. One possible explanation might be that large areas in present-day Finland played an inconsiderable role in pre-Viking and early Viking Age eastward-directed communication routes, the aspect that is more or less directly reflected in the Nordic sagas. More locally characterised communication over the Gulf of Bothnia, especially between the elite families in the nascent *Svea* state and chieftains in the western and

103 The Saga of the Ynglings, 13.

104 The Saga of the Ynglings, 19.

south-western coasts of Finland, on the other hand, was intensive, at least according to the archaeological evidence. These contacts, that from time to time probably included intermarriages and the movement of people, were also mirrored in stories dealing with the genealogy of the royal Swedish Ynglinga family.

When Finland and Finns were sometimes described in the mystical stories of the legendary sagas, in most cases this occurs in connection with events in *Garðaríki*. In the *Saga of Halfdan Eysteinsson*, for instance, two Finnish witch-kings helped the king of *Kirjálabotn* (perhaps the Karelian Isthmus).¹⁰⁵ When Finnish kings were mentioned by name, the names were often mythical and similar to these in the *Ynglinga Saga*: e.g. Snæ (Snow) and Frost. One can assume that when *Finni* were mentioned at all in these narratives, they represented the eastern part of the present country. In the second half of the 10th century, the geographic situation of present-day Finland may have appeared as follows:¹⁰⁶

East of *Naumudal* lies *Jamtaland*, then *Helsingjaland* [all three are districts in northern Sweden], *Kvenland* [Häme in present-day Finland], *Finnland* [probably the south-western coastal part of present-day Finland], and finally *Kirjálaland* [Karelia]. But *Finnmörk* [Finmark], lying beyond, is more mountainous than any of these other lands...

A largely similar picture of Finland was also presented by Saxo Grammaticus. In the first nine books of his *Gesta Danorum* Finland appeared as a country characterised by matrimonial connections with *Ruthenia*, Saxony or Sweden. There were plundering raids both to and from Finland, Finns sometimes fought in alliance with *Bjarmaland*, and often used their witchcraft.¹⁰⁷

The central part of present-day Finland, Häme or Tavastland, probably appeared in some sagas and writings under the name *Rafestaland* – e.g. in the list of the countries that came to assist the king of *Garðaríki*.¹⁰⁸ In the account of Othere's voyages, as well as in some Icelandic sagas, people called *Cwenas* or *Kvenir* were mentioned, probably indicating later *kainulaiset* in Ostrobothnia. That *Kurir* and *Kvaenir* were raiding in Sweden, was briefly mentioned in "The Story of Norna-Gest", a legendary saga written down in Middle Ages.¹⁰⁹ Some

¹⁰⁵ The Saga of Halfdan, 15.

¹⁰⁶ Egil's Saga, 14.

¹⁰⁷ Saxo Grammaticus, 1.4.15., 3.2.8., 3.4.1., 7.2.12.

¹⁰⁸ Hauksbok, 15; Örvar Odds saga, 30.

¹⁰⁹ The Story of Norna-Gest, 7.

scholars have suggested that the name *Kvenir* applied to a Finnish-Swedish mixed population on the western coast of the Gulf of Bothnia.¹¹⁰ A more detailed late-10th-century account of *Kveni* and *Kvenland* can be found in the *Egil's Saga*.¹¹¹

That same winter Thorolf set off north again to Finnmark, taking nearly a hundred men along with him. He went about things just as in the year before, trading with the Lapps [*Finna*] and travelling all over Finnmark. He'd penetrated well to the east when some people of the Kven [*Kveni*] tribe came and told him they'd been sent by King Faravid of Kvenland [*Kvenlandi*]. They said the Karelians [*Kirjálar*] were attacking Faravid's kingdom, and he wanted Thorolf to go there and help him. The message added that Thorolf would get equal share of the plunder with Faravid, and each of Thorolf's men the same as three Kvens ... As soon as Thorolf joined up with King Faravid to the east in Kvenland they got themselves ready for the campaign, the Kvens with three hundred men and the Norwegians a hundred or so more. They made their way through the highlands of Finnmark until, on a mountain, they found themselves face to face with the Karelians who had been attacking the Kvens ... [in the battle that followed the united forces of *Kveni* and the Vikings were victorious] ... King Faravid and Thorolf took a deal of plunder, after which they went back to Kvenland.

Another place name in the Icelandic sagas connected with Finland is *Bálagarðssiða*. From the context where it has been used, it seems to apply to some place on the south-western coast.¹¹² The best description of *Bálagarðssiða* was given in the story of how young Ólaf Haraldson on his first Viking trip attacked Finland after pillaging on Saaremaa. The Finns, as was typical in the sagas, fought back with the help of their witchcraft.¹¹³

Afterwards he [Ólaf Haraldson] sailed back to Finland, harried there, and invaded the country, and all the people fled into the forests, emptying their homes of all property. The king went far inland and through some forests, until they came to some valley settlements, called *Herdalar*.

110 Valtonen 2007a and references.

111 Egil's Saga, 14.

112 The Saga of Halfdan, 15; The Story of Burnt Njal, 119.

113 Saint Ólaf's Saga, 9.

There they found little property and no people. The day wore on, and the king returned toward his ships. But when they passed through the forest, they were attacked fiercely from all sides with arrow shots. The king bade his men protect themselves as best they could and advance against the enemy, but that was difficult as the Finns hid behind trees. And before the king left the forest behind, he had lost many men, and many were wounded before he reached the ships late in the evening. During the night, the Finns with their witchcraft made a furious gale and a storm at sea. But the king bade his men weigh anchor and hoist the sails and cruise before the land during the night. And then, as often afterwards, the king's luck prevailed over the magic of the Finns. During the night they cruised along *Bálagarðssiða* and from there out to sea. The army of the Finns followed them on land as the king sailed outside.

4.2.6 *Estland*

As was demonstrated above, medieval scholars from the middle or southern half of Europe described the *Aesti* region mainly with features that were more characteristic of the southern coastal population of this region – e.g. that they collected amber. From these narrators' position, this was understandable. Still, other narratives, told by people living further north, which reach back to the 9th century or earlier, seem predominantly to have been interested in the area that was closest to them and, in respect to eastern trade routes, probably more relevant.

Estland was mentioned in *Ynglinga Saga* in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (written down at the beginning of the 13th century) in a context that seems to refer to a time before the Viking Age, as well as in the *History of Norway* (*Historia Norwegiae*), in connection with Swedish king Yngvar's plundering raids to Estonia, who in this way tried to stop Estonian Vikings (*Vikingr frá Esthland*) ravaging Sweden. In the *Ynglingatal* from the late 9th century, which was relying on part of Snorri's *Ynglinga Saga*,¹¹⁴ Estonia was called *Eistneskr*.¹¹⁵ According to the *Ynglinga Saga*, king Yngvar was killed either in coastal Estonia (*Aðalsýsla*, probably west and north-west Estonia), or on Saaremaa (*Eysýsla*), which is, in this source, locating *Estland* to approximately present-day Estonia (see in more detail Section 5.1.4.).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Skre 2007c; Mundal 2009.

¹¹⁵ *Ynglingatal*, 25–26.

¹¹⁶ The Saga of the Ynglings, 32.

It is also worth mentioning that the Estonians (*Eistneskr*) were, according to *Ynglingatal*, also called *Sýslu kind*,¹¹⁷ which in southern Scandinavia was a term for a tax-paying district. In the *History of Norway*, it is simply stated that “...Yngvar, nicknamed ‘the White’, was killed in a campaign on an island in the Baltic Sea which is called *Eysýsla* by the natives”.¹¹⁸ Later Yngvar’s son Onund avenged his father with a victorious campaign to *Estland*.¹¹⁹

Saxo Grammaticus mentioned *Esthonia* several times, both in the mythological and the historical part of his *Gesta Danorum*, and this name seems to overlap with what he called *Ruthenia* from time to time. After Olmar had conquered Jämtland and Helsingland for the Danes, he “...also took *Esthonia* and *Curonia*, with Öland, and the isles that fringe Sweden”.¹²⁰ Soon afterwards Frotho the Danish king, divided his estates as follows:¹²¹

He made Olimar regent of *Holmgardie*, Ønef of *Cønogardie*, assigned Saxony to Hun, his captive, and Orkney to Revil. A man named Dimar was put in charge of the provinces of the Hålsings, the Jarnbers, the Jämtes, and both of the Lapp peoples; the rule of *Hestie* [Estonia] was bequeathed to Dag ... Frotho’s domains now embraced *Ruscia* to the east and were bounded by the River Rhine in the west.

That Estonia did or was believed to have paid tribute to Frotho reappears later in the same book, where Frotho granted to Erik “...Helsingland with the two Laplands, Finland and *Esthonia*, under a yearly tribute”.¹²²

The mythological hero Starkadr was, according to Saxo, born in the land bordering Sweden in the east, “that which now contains the wide-flung dwellings of the *Estlanders* and other numerous savage hordes”. He had ended up in Denmark after a shipwreck in which all his friends perished, and pursued a career in Frotho’s court.¹²³ Together with the Vendic prince Vin he undertook Viking raids against the Couronians, Sambians, Semgallians, and other people in the east (*Curetum*, *Semborum*, *Samgalarum omniumque postremo Orientalum*), and thereafter in *Ruthenia* and Byzantium.¹²⁴ According to Saxo,

¹¹⁷ *Ynglingatal*, 25.

¹¹⁸ *A History of Norway*, 13:22–24.

¹¹⁹ *The Saga of the Ynglings*, 33.

¹²⁰ Saxo Grammaticus, 5.8.6.

¹²¹ Saxo Grammaticus, 5.8.8.

¹²² Saxo Grammaticus, 5.10.2.

¹²³ Saxo Grammaticus, 6.5.1–2.

¹²⁴ Saxo Grammaticus, 6.5.14–15.

Starkadr boasted “I crushed the Couronians [*Kurios*], and those races reared in *Estland* and in Semgallia [*Estia gentes et populous Semgala*]!”¹²⁵

A description of Viking Age Estonia was given in the *Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason*, a later Norwegian king, who in the 980s and 990s spent six years of his childhood as a slave in *Estland* (see more detail in Section 6.2.9.).¹²⁶ In this story, Vikings of Estonian origin were mentioned, as well as the fact that the prince of Novgorod collected taxes in part of the country. Since the person who was sent to Estonia to collect the taxes was Scandinavian, the area under question most likely embraced the coastal zone. The narrative mentions that slave markets were held in Estonia; these were visited by Norwegian merchants, and Estonian Vikings also visited the market of *Hólmgarðr*, probably for trade.¹²⁷ Slavery in Estonia was indirectly also mentioned in another story from the last decades of the 12th century, where the pagan father of a young converted Estonian let himself be baptised after a severe illness, and afterwards always protected, to the best of his ability, any Christian fleeing from slavery in Estonia (see Section 7.2.2.).¹²⁸

In addition to *Estland* in general, there are also some districts or places in present-day Estonia which occur in Scandinavian sagas. *Eysýsla* and *Aðalsýsla*, or in some cases simply *Sýslar*, are probably the most widespread.¹²⁹ It is pretty certain that *Eysýsla* was the name of present-day Saaremaa; however, the name probably included not only the largest island, but also smaller islands around it, thus indicating the whole archipelago.

Aðalsýsla is generally believed to have applied to west Estonia opposite Saaremaa. Still, the inhabited area in west Estonia is not particularly large, while vast wetlands and sandy areas form a great part of this region. According to archaeological evidence, culturally west Estonia belongs together with the inhabited clusters of the north-western coast of the country, including the densely populated area around present-day Tallinn. Since the name *Aðalsýsla* was frequently mentioned by saga-tellers, its relevance seems to extend beyond just the western corner of present-day Estonia, suggesting that the term *Aðalsýsla* covered the whole mainland of coastal Estonia.¹³⁰ Indirectly, it is also referred to

125 Saxo Grammaticus, 8.8.9.

126 A History of Norway, 19; The Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason, 6–7.

127 The Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason, 8, 52.

128 The Passion and Miracles, 67–69.

129 In addition to the references given above, see The Story of Burnt Njal, 30; A History of Norway, 23; The Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason, 90; Saint Ólaf's Saga, 8.

130 Estonia can be divided culturally into coastal and inland regions. For an overview of archaeological features enabling such a division, see Tvauri 2012: 321–325. Tvauri has chosen to consider Virumaa as belonging to coastal Estonia, too.

in *Njal's Saga*, where a certain Thorkel with meaningful nickname Foulmouth bragged that, after he had killed a wild man in *Bálagarðssíða* in south-western Finland, "...fared east into *Aðalsýslu*, and there he slew a flying fire-drake".¹³¹

Virumaa district on the north-east coast of the country, separated from the Tallinn area by large infertile lands, formed an individual district, at least according to its archaeological culture. It sometimes appeared in Scandinavian sources as *Vírland* (see also topic 4.2.11.).¹³²

Another district, or perhaps hill-fort and market-place in Estonia, was called *Rafala* – the Vikings Gunnar and Hallvadr stayed there for some time in the late 10th century and fought with sea-rovers.¹³³ It is not difficult to associate the place with Rävåla around present-day Tallinn, or perhaps a kind of proto-Tallinn – in German, the city was later called Reval. The occurrence of the toponym in several lists of countries suggests,¹³⁴ on the one hand, that the district was probably called the same as its centre, as was common in *Garðaríki*, and, on the other hand, that the district was considered influential enough to be mentioned individually.

In several sources, *Estland* was listed among the countries that belonged to the Swedish dominion. In the *Saga of Ólaf Haraldson* the Swedish king Ólaf Skötkonung was accused in a *Thing* at Uppsala in the early 11th century of having lost control over ancient Swedish taxation lands, among the others *Estland*.¹³⁵ In the late 11th century, Adam of Bremen considered the islands of *Aestland*, *Churland*, and *Semland* as belonging to the Swedes.¹³⁶ Finally, a source from the first half of the 12th century, known as "the Florence document", named *Findia* (Finland) and *Hestia* (Estonia) among the "islands", that is, provinces of Sweden.¹³⁷

4.2.7 *Livland*

A country called *Livland* appears seldom in Scandinavian sources, but the water route from the Baltic along the River Daugava down to Byzantium can be found, for instance in the mythical part of *Gutasaga*. Although clearly dealing with times before the Viking age, the saga itself was written down in the 13th century, and its geographical data is more likely to reflect the reality of this

¹³¹ The Story of Burnt Njal, 119.

¹³² Hauksbok, 15; Örvar Odds saga, 30.

¹³³ The Story of Burnt Njal, 30.

¹³⁴ Hauksbok, 15; Örvar Odds saga, 30.

¹³⁵ Saint Ólaf's Saga, 80.

¹³⁶ Adam of Bremen, 416.

¹³⁷ Blomkvist 2005a:577–578.

period. It is still interesting to note that the river led to *Ruza land*, and not *Garðaríki*, which, in the pre-Viking Age meaning of *Garðaríki*, also was true.

Then, over a long time, the people [of Gotland] ... multiplied so much that the land couldn't support them all. So they selected every third person by lot to leave, with the right to keep and take away with them everything they owned except for their land. They were unwilling to leave then, but went instead to Torsburgen and settled there. But afterwards the country [Gotland] would not tolerate them, and drove them away.

Then they went away to Färö and settled there. They couldn't support themselves in that place, so they went to a certain island off the coast of *Aistland*, called *Dagaithi* [the island of *Hiiumaa*?],¹³⁸ and settled there and built a town that can still be seen. But they couldn't support themselves there either, so they went up the river *Dyna* [Daugava], up through *Ryza land* [Russia]. They went so far that they came to the land of the Greeks [Byzantium] ... So they settled there, and live there still, and still have something of our language.¹³⁹

However, the big river Daugava was also mentioned in Icelandic legendary sagas and in other Scandinavian sources. The anonymous author of *Göngu-Hrólfs Saga* says more about the River Daugava, and about the interest the kings of *Garðaríki* expressed in the lower reaches of this river:¹⁴⁰

... the story tells how in his younger days he [King Hreggvid] used to spend much of his time fighting. He'd won territory beyond the river *Dýnu* [Daugava] that flows through *Garðaríki*; and he subjugated lands along the river and plundered from there the neighbouring peoples in *Austríki* and taken from them many a rare treasure. This river is the third or fourth biggest in the world and it was to find its source that Yngvar the Traveller set out, as told in his saga.

King Hreggvid spent seven long years on his expedition, but when people thought he must be dead he came back to *Garðaríki* and settled down.

138 Hiiumaa's name in German and Scandinavian languages is Dagö. According to current knowledge, it was more or less uninhabited throughout the Iron Age. No remains of a fortification are known there either.

139 Gutasaga. The Discovery and Settlement of Gotland.

140 Göngu-Hrólfs Saga, 1; place names changed after the Russian translation in Drevneskandinavskiy istochnik, 277–278.

They sailed up the river *Dyna*, plundering both banks, burning settlements and looting everything they could lay hands on. Many submitted to them, and in that way they added considerably to their forces ... [they put up their tents on a high cliff, and protected them with a huge magic tent] ... They had arrived in *Garðaríki* just before winter nights ... [followed by the description of a snow-storm].¹⁴¹

The last paragraph contained an interesting statement about local warriors joining the army of plundering Vikings. Later in this story it turned out that the newly increased army, which was now said to have been in *Garðaríki*, was collected somewhere along the coast. There they suffered a strong magical storm, but were saved and later continued their trip. Geopolitically the episode can only be explained by the fact that, as was mentioned before in the saga, the estuary of the River Daugava was subjugated by early Viking Age *Garðaríki* kings. A land called *Lifland* can also be found among the countries that supported the king of *Aldeigjuborg*.¹⁴²

The River Daugava was probably mentioned by Saxo Grammaticus under the toponym *Hellespont*. The name *Hellespont* itself seems to refer to a big river, which was also reinforced in the stories by the mention of “a large river” in *Hellespont*. What is more, the biggest stronghold and residence of the local king bore the name *Duna*. The mythological Danish kings Haddings and Frotho attacked the *Hellespont*, according to Saxo, several times, sometimes more successfully than others. It is also interesting to note that the same author described matrimonial connections in *Hellespont* with both Danish and *Ruthenian* (that is, probably *Garðaríki*) royal families.¹⁴³

Saxo Grammaticus also mentioned *Lívlund* in the description of the mythical *Brávalla* battle, where warriors of this country were believed to have participated on the Danish side.¹⁴⁴ More interesting is that there was also talk of the fleet of the *Livs* (*Livi*), together with those of the Slavs and Saxons, thus indicating their maritime activities.¹⁴⁵ Later in the same book Saxo included a story of *Bikke*, who tried to damage King *Jarmerik* for avenging the death of

141 Göngu-Hrólfs Saga, 28; translation is somewhat changed according to Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 284. The author is grateful to Mart Kuldkepp for his kind help in translating from Icelandic.

142 Örvar Odd's Saga, 30.

143 Saxo Grammaticus, 1.6.7–10, 2.1.4–9.

144 Saxo Grammaticus, 8.2.6.

145 Saxo Grammaticus, 8.4.1.

his brothers. Bikke was called the son of the king of the Livs, but without more exact references to his country of origin.¹⁴⁶

In the last of Saxo's mythological books a longer description of how Regner the Danish king (in other sources: Ragnar Lodbrok) waged war against *Hellespont* can be found, which Saxo presumably considered to be the same area as Livonia. Prince Daxon of *Hellespont* gained victory over Hvidserk, the king of *Ruthenia*, and killed him. As revenge, King Regner attacked *Ruthenia* and imprisoned Daxon, but had mercy on him and gave him back his country on the condition that every year together with 12 elders he must pay his tribute barefoot.¹⁴⁷ Narratives given in some Icelandic sagas, for instance the death of Hvidserk in *Austrvegr*,¹⁴⁸ or the note that other kings had to pay tribute to one king, Geirrödar in *Austrvegr*, so that they had to bring him their beard and moustache over the course of 12 years can easily be recognised here.¹⁴⁹ The fact that these events, according to different narratives, occurred in *Austrvegr*, in *Hellespont*, or in *Ruthenia* (or *Garðaríki*), points to how closely these areas were connected to each other, at least in the minds of early medieval Scandinavians.¹⁵⁰ Saxo's stories in any case correlate well with the data given in *Göngu-Hrólfs Saga*, that the kings of *Garðaríki* had subdued some areas in the estuary of the River Daugava.

4.2.8 Kúrland

The first mention of Couronia can be found in Rimbert's chronicle *Vita Ansgarii*, written in the 870s (for a longer reference to this narrative, see Section 5.2.2.). There is a description of the Swedish king Olof's campaign to *Cori* land, where in 854 they conquered two strongholds – *Seeburg* and *Aputra*. The first one is commonly identified as Grobiņa in present-day Latvia, and the second one as Apuolė in present-day Lithuania.¹⁵¹ Some scholars have however challenged

146 Saxo Grammaticus, 8.10.8.

147 Saxo Grammaticus, 9.4.30–32.

148 Ragnars Saga, 18; The Saga of Harald Fairhair, 33, 35.

149 Örvar Odd's Saga, 23.

150 Mixing together areas and countries in the Eastern Baltic is very common also in present-day Scandinavia. A good example is, for instance, a jurisprudence textbook for Danish logistics that offers a case where a Danish ship arriving in the harbour of Riga could choose between international or Estonian legislation (Föh *et al.* 2011: 245). There is probably no reason to expect better geographical knowledge from early medieval scholars, although merchants and travellers might have had better and more practical knowledge.

151 Nerman 1958; Lamm *et al.* 2009.

the latter interpretation, and suggested Pilten or more likely Pabērskalns hill-fort further north in Couronia at the River Venta instead.¹⁵²

The chronicle stated that the *Cori* had been subjected to the Swedes, but then rebelled. After that, the Danes had tried to subdue them, but with no success. King Olaf however, conquered both strongholds again, as a result of which the *Cori* promised obedience to the rule of the Swedish king, to pay tribute as before, and to give hostages.¹⁵³ This is a perfect description of Viking Age control over a taxation land.¹⁵⁴

This dependency is perhaps referred to in a somewhat obscure paragraph in *Göngu-Hrólfs Saga*. The Viking Jolgeir, who was described thoroughly negatively, was pillaging with his warriors in *Austrvegr*. Describing his villainous behaviour, the saga mentioned that he also raided near Couronia – perhaps because this was under the dominion of Sweden, that is, of the country where Jolgeir himself came from:¹⁵⁵

That summer they went on a viking expedition. Jolgeir plundered quite ruthlessly, usually robbing farmers and merchants. He plundered mostly in *Kúrland* and collected plenty of loot.

According to Saxo Grammaticus the Couronians had, in some undefined past, rebelled against the Danes together with the Swedes.¹⁵⁶

The Kurlanders [*Curetes*] and Swedes [*Sueones*], who used to show their allegiance to Denmark each year with the payment of taxes, felt as though the death of Hother had liberated them from their oppressive tributary status and had the idea of making an armed attack on the Danes.

The northern part of Couronia, called *Vanema* (*Vane-land*) in historical times,¹⁵⁷ was possibly referred to in the *Ynglinga Saga*, where King Sveighthir, who spent five years in *Svíþjóð* the Great, that is, in the east, “...in *Vanaland* he had married a woman named Vana. Their son was Vanlandi”.¹⁵⁸ Vanlandi

¹⁵² For the different interpretations see Mugurēvičs 1997.

¹⁵³ Rimbert, 30.

¹⁵⁴ Blomkvist 2009b.

¹⁵⁵ *Göngu-Hrólfs Saga*, 6.

¹⁵⁶ Saxo Grammaticus, 3.5.1.

¹⁵⁷ Asaris *et al.* 2008: 139.

¹⁵⁸ The Saga of the Ynglings, 12.

became king of *Svíþjóð* after his father had perished in a place called *at Steini*, and was himself married to a Finnish princess Drifa (see Section 4.2.5.).

Somewhat surprisingly, *Kúrland* was generally mentioned in the Icelandic sagas less frequently and in a less detailed way than, for instance, *Eysýsla*. Normally the name occurred in lists of countries that could easily have been put together later than the events of the sagas themselves. As a notable exception, *Egil's Saga* contained an unusually long and ethnographically detailed description of how a Couronian farm was plundered by Norwegian Vikings in the 930s (see Section 6.3.3.).¹⁵⁹ Moreover, one can read there of a market place somewhere in Couronia or close by, where the same Vikings stayed two weeks for the purpose of trading.

The latest indirect indication of possible links between Sweden and Couronia can be found in the *Knytlinga Saga*, or, more precisely, in the same story given by Saxo Grammaticus (see the text and closer discussion in Section 7.1.2.2.). In the *Knytlinga Saga*, Couronians were ravaging in Blekinge with ten ships and were all killed by Danes.¹⁶⁰ According to Saxo, the pirates were not only Couronians, but also Estonians.¹⁶¹ Nils Blomkvist has suggested that Saxo had some knowledge of Couronians and Estonians acting together on the Swedish side, something that he also showed in his description of the *Brávalla* battle in the epic past, where both Couronians and Estonians fought for Sweden.¹⁶²

In a mythological saga of Norna-Gest, Couronians were mentioned as ravaging Sweden together with *Kvænir*, another Baltic Finnic ethnic group in present-day Finland.¹⁶³ Apparently close cooperation between Couronians and Estonians (or sometimes more precisely the Saaremaa-Estonians) is evident about half century later in the chronicle of Henry the Livonian as well. There seem to be no other ethnic groups around the Baltic Sea cooperating together in maritime military actions on the same scale as Couronians, (Saaremaa) Estonians, and possibly Finns, especially not groups with presumably different languages, mythologies, and social systems.

4.2.9 Kúrland-Samland-Saaremaa

It has generally been believed that the toponyms *Estland*, *Kúrland*, and *Samland* (or *Semland*) divided the eastern coastal zone of the Baltic into three,

¹⁵⁹ Egil's Saga, 46; Sayers 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Knytlinga Saga 123.

¹⁶¹ Saxo Grammaticus, 14.40.

¹⁶² Blomkvist 2005a.

¹⁶³ The Story of Norna-Gest, 7.

Estland denoting the present-day Estonia, *Kúrland* the coastal areas of the present-day Latvia and Lithuania, and *Samland* the present-day Kaliningrad oblast of Russia. This division seems especially logical when assuming, following the ethnic situation in recent history, that *Kúrland* and *Samland* were inhabited only by ethnic Balts, and because of this would already have been treated separately from *Estland*, whose name earlier applied to the whole Eastern Baltic coast. Why in fact the ethnic Baltic areas got a new name, while *Estland* only remained for the Finnic, and thus, according to these arguments, the most alien part of the region, nevertheless remains unclear.

Still, the situation appears to have been more complicated than described above. These three toponyms seem to have overlapped in many aspects, were often mentioned together or with different meanings, and some sources seem to have preferred one or two of them to the others. As demonstrated below, there are no grounds to connect these Viking Age toponyms directly with areas where these names have survived until our times.

Although *Kúrland* is referred to comparatively often in western written sources, especially by Saxo, Eastern Baltic archaeological material demonstrates the strongest similarities with Scandinavia not in present Couronia¹⁶⁴ but on Saaremaa and the historical Livonian area in the lower reaches of the River Daugava as well as on the eastern coasts of the Bay of Riga (see detail in Chapter 2). This applies not only to male jewellery, accessories, and weapons, but also grave forms and partly even to local female jewellery. The only exception in favour of Couronia was the mainly pre-Viking Scandinavian colony at Grobiņa, which, however, seems not to have succeeded in influencing the surrounding local culture on any considerable scale.¹⁶⁵ A similar Scandinavian colony, chronologically succeeding Grobiņa, probably existed in Kaup-Wiskiauten in the northern part of the Sambia peninsula, as is indicated by 9th–10th-century graves with Scandinavian artefacts. Scandinavian influence outside Kaup, in the area of the Prussians in general, seems nevertheless to have been quite modest.¹⁶⁶

In particular, artefact types signalling local identity (e.g. jewellery, but also weapons and several other items) demonstrate, on the other hand, close cultural interaction between Saaremaa and Couronia, and this is true not only for the Finnic population in Couronia but also for what are believed to have been

164 Couronia is defined here as the whole coastal region of Lithuania and Latvia, up to the very end of the Kurzeme peninsula.

165 See also Jansson 2000.

166 Kulakov 1994.

the Baltic Cours.¹⁶⁷ The Finnic ethnic group inhabiting the region of present Couronia has in professional literature normally been described as Couronian Livs, although both Paul Johansen and Evald Tõnisson have convincingly demonstrated the discontinuity between the prehistoric Finnic inhabitants on Couronia, and the Livs who moved to the northern coasts of the Kurzeme peninsula only in historical periods (see Section 2.3.3.).¹⁶⁸ The ethnic composition of the Couronian population in prehistory and the early medieval period is the subject of discussions with a strong national bias, relying mainly on interpretations of burial rites and artefacts. However, according to personal names in written sources the Finnic percentage of the population in Couronia was still considerable even as late as in the 16th century.¹⁶⁹

Saaremaa (Scan. and Germ. *Ösel*) is often referred to in Old Norse sources as *Eysýsla*, in contrast to *Aðalsýsla*, which is believed to have designated mainland Estonia (see also earlier in this text).¹⁷⁰ However, the name *Eysýsla* probably indicated not only what is Saaremaa now, but the whole district of Estonian islands, including the “big” island, the islands of Muhu (*Mohn*) and Hiiumaa (*Dagö*) with all the smaller islands and islets around them. The name *Ösel* covered approximately the same area in the Middle Ages, and was only later reduced to denote present-day Saaremaa and Muhu.

The biggest of the Estonian islands, which now bears the name Saaremaa (approx: “The District/Land of Islands”), had until the early 19th century a parallel name Kuresaar or Kurasaar (Couronian/Cour Island). Derived from the former broader meaning of Saaremaa-Ösel it is logical to believe that *Kuresaar* was the original name of the biggest island of Saaremaa, thus reinforcing the cultural unity that is obvious in the archaeological evidence in present Couronia and Saaremaa. In support of this, there is also a folk tradition that believes the earlier inhabitants of Saaremaa were the Couronians (*kuralased*); however, at least at the time when this data was collected, this term meant the ethnically Finnic population on the peninsula of Kurzeme.¹⁷¹

The etymology of the people's name *kuralased/kurelased* (Couronians) refers to the possibility that this word originally had more a social than an ethnic meaning. *Kura* in Estonian and *kure* in Livic mean something wicked, evil; derivations of this word are for instance Finnish *kuri* (villainy; but also:

167 Mägi 2005b.

168 Johansen 1939: 271ff; Tõnisson 1970.

169 Johansen 1939: 271–282, ill. 168.

170 Tarvel 1994.

171 Latv. *zeme* means “land”, so Kurzeme is literally “Cour-Land”. The Estonian *Kuramaa*, where *maa* stands for “land”, has the same meaning.

discipline) or *kurja* (evil, ignoble), Estonian *kuri* (evil), *kurakäsi* (left hand), or *kurat* (Satan).¹⁷² Place names connected with Kura/Kure occur in Estonia predominantly on Saaremaa, but also in some inland districts on the mainland. It can be suggested, therefore, that *kura/kure* once upon a time meant only a certain group of people, perhaps the ones connected with military activity, and thus was a parallel to Scandinavian “Viking” or, as will be demonstrated below, to the early *Rus’*.

4.2.10 Sam-land and Sam-island

The confusion with the earliest district names in the Eastern Baltic can be even more complicated, especially when we take into account how the ethnonym *Sami* was used historically. Saaremaa in Latvian is *Samzala* (i.e. Sam-Island), while *Sami* or *Samit* was at least historically used for the Finnic population among ethnic Balts.¹⁷³ For instance *Samit* in historical Couronia probably indicated immigrants from Saaremaa, or some other Finnic-speaking people.¹⁷⁴ Finnish *Suomi* or Estonian *Soome* for Finland could easily have their roots in the same tradition to indicate Baltic Finns as *sami(t)*. Could the pair of names Cour-Land and Cour-Island (Estonian *Kuramaa* and *Kurasaar*), as was demonstrated above, be paralleled with Sam-Land and Sam-Island? It is not completely unlikely that *Samland*, at least in some sources, could have indicated the same area as *Kúrland*, perhaps together with Kur-Island.

It is most interesting that the toponym *Samland* or *Semland* hardly existed in the Icelandic sagas, although other place names of Eastern Baltic origin were quite common there. When *Samland* was mentioned in a few cases, it referred to Prussian Sambia, which remained outside *Austrvegr*. These references tend to be comparatively late; a story of Vidgaut, an early-12th-century merchant from *Samland*, who could speak several languages and was often out in *Austrvegr* for trading, can serve here as an example.¹⁷⁵ Vidgaut was attacked by Couronians and tried to escape back to *Samland*, which indicates two different countries (see detail in Section 7.1.2.1.).

Saxo, who wrote rather more about *Samland* in the historical part of his chronicle, mentioned this country only three times in the mythological part.

¹⁷² Metsmägi *et al.* 2012: 193–194.

¹⁷³ Sami people as they are known now in the northern part of Scandinavia and Finland, were in earlier sources always referred to as *Fenni*, *Scyrefinnæ*, *Terfinnas*, or something similar. It is another example of how names have moved in the course of time – these ethnonyms became the name of present Finland (e.g. Valtonen 2007b).

¹⁷⁴ Johansen 1939: 277.

¹⁷⁵ Knytlinga Saga, 87–88.

It was always listed together with other countries, in one case referring to the lands of *Curonum*, *Semborum*, and *Samgalarum* as the target of Starkadr's plundering trips.¹⁷⁶ Such lists in older parts of his chronicle reflect, however, not the original story, but the geographical knowledge of the chronicler's own time.

The ambivalent meaning of *Semland* or something similar is particularly well demonstrated in the story of King Ragnar (or Regner) Lodbrok, who decided to attack the *Biarmes*. At the beginning of this campaign, the *Bjarma* sorcerers bewitched the weather, and forced Ragnar to sail in the only direction he could – meaning that he ended up in the land of the Couronians and the Sambians (*in Curorum Semborumque regionem*).¹⁷⁷ Here is a clear hint that the region under question could geographically be the same area. The way to the *Biarmes* should have meant sailing through the Gulf of Finland, and the place that he actually reached was probably the Kurzeme peninsula. Saxo, or more likely some earlier author, records King Ragnar as having been received there as a victorious warlord, thus hinting at a possible pre-existing treaty or its previously established status as a tributary land.¹⁷⁸

Saxo's choice of ethnonyms corresponded at least in his time to the southern half of the Eastern Baltic, which is reinforced by the naming of a Vendic prince. Vends were also mentioned in connection with *Semborum*, *Curetum compluriumque Orientis*, when King Jarmerik continued to attack them after he defeated the Vends.¹⁷⁹

In the *Saga of Yngvar the Traveller*, talking of the early 11th century, Yngvar and Onund sailed, on behalf of the Swedish king, to a land called *Seimgalir*, which had stopped paying taxes to the king. It was a country with its own king, who was, however, completely dependent on local chiefs. Three of the latter refused to pay taxes, and were thereafter forced to do so by military attack (see also Section 7.1.1.2.).¹⁸⁰

This event correlates well with developments in Sweden, described in other sources. Only a couple of years before Yngvar and Onund's journey to *Semgalir*, there had been a *Thing* in Uppsala, where, according to the *Saga of Óláf Haraldson*, the Swedish king Óláf Skötkonung was severely criticised for disregarding farmers' opinions and for allowing "...his scat-lands in other countries to go from him through laziness and weakness". The king was literally

176 Saxo Grammaticus, 6.5.14.

177 Saxo Grammaticus, 9.4.23.

178 Saxo Grammaticus, 9.4.23.

179 Saxo Grammaticus, 8.10.6.

180 Yngvar the Traveller, 4.

threatened with death, unless he would conclude peace with Ólaf the king of Norway, and “...re-conquer the kingdoms in *Austrvegr* which thy relations and forefathers had there”. The list of Swedish taxation lands was given earlier in the same text: “...*Finnland* and *Kirjálaland*, *Estland* and *Kúrland*, and *Austrlöndi* all around”.¹⁸¹ Although Sengallia can principally be counted under the other *Austrlöndi*, it is however more likely that for instance *Eysýsla*, that is, the island of Saaremaa, which had been pillaged, together with other Swedish dominions, by Ólaf Haraldson a few years before the *Thing* in Uppsala, should be regarded as the destination of Yngvar and Onund.¹⁸²

The narrative of *Seimgalir* would actually fit better with some coastal region and not historical Sengallia, which is an inland district separated from the coast by a zone of wetlands over ten kilometres wide. It is certainly possible to reach Sengallian areas via the river of Lielupe; however, quite modest Scandinavian influence in Sengallian archaeological material indicates, at least, that such taxation dependency could not have been very long-lasting. It also draws attention to the fact that Sengallia was otherwise never mentioned in Scandinavian sagas or other documents. In a few cases, however, a toponym *Semland* or *Samland* was referred to, but in a combination that pointed to Sambia in what later became Prussia. Even these references were very rare, especially in stories telling of the pre-Viking or Viking Age – this area clearly remained outside the eastern Vikings’ interest. It is therefore so much the more unexpected to find a full-length story of *Seimgalir* in a context that clearly points to a close connection with Middle Sweden and *Svearíki*.

4.2.11 *Eastern Baltic Places on Runic Stones*

Eastern Baltic areas were mentioned quite often in runic stones that can be found mainly in Sweden and Denmark, though with a clear concentration in central Swedish areas, especially Uppland and Södermanland, that is, in the territory of *Svearíki*. The majority are dated to the late 10th–11th centuries, seldom to the earlier or later period, but all the stones mentioned here date from the 11th century. The text on these stones is stereotypical, mainly commemorating someone, or manifesting Christianisation, status, or inheritance. The inscriptions on some stones describe communication between different

¹⁸¹ Saint Ólaf’s Saga, 80.

¹⁸² The combination of names Yngvar and Onund, although in a different context here, recalls the story of Yngvar in *Ynglinga Saga*, who fell in *Estland* and was revenged by his son Onund, who pillaged in *Estland* after his father’s death. It is possible, therefore, that both these stories rely on the same earlier narrative.

areas, referring to destinations east of Scandinavia among others.¹⁸³ Eastern Baltic areas and Russia were mentioned on more than 20 stones, around twice as many as those mentioning western destinations.¹⁸⁴ This phenomenon can, nevertheless, be explained by the area where most of these stones were concentrated, which was geopolitically closer to eastern countries than to England or other areas in the west.

Most of the runic stones on which the Eastern Baltic was mentioned in one connection or another commemorate someone who perished there. Still, there are also stones recording that the person commemorated travelled or even traded in these countries. The choice of Eastern Baltic place names mentioned on runic stones is, however, somewhat different from the saga literature.

Estland is mentioned twice, but in quite an ambivalent combination. On a stone from Frugården (Vg 181), a man commemorated his son who had been killed i estlatum; the plural form seems to indicate that *Estland* was here understood in a broader sense.¹⁸⁵ Another Swede, who erected a stone at Stora Släbro (Sö 45), had the nickname aistfari, which may possibly refer to his frequent travel to this country.¹⁸⁶ There was also a stone, now lost, in Steninge, commemorating a man who had steered a ship to the east with Ingvar to askalat, which may be a misspelling of either *Estland* and *Serkland* (the latter indicating southern areas).¹⁸⁷ In addition *Virland* (urlati, uirlanti), the north-eastern coastal district in Estonia, is referred to on as many as three stones, although two of them seem to commemorate the same person (stones at Frösunda church, U 346† and Ängby U 356; the third is found at Roslags-Bro church, U 533).¹⁸⁸

A runic stone at Åda (Sö 39) commemorates a man who had drowned in Livonia (iflanti). The inscription on a stone at the Veckholm Church (U 698†) probably mentioned the same district,¹⁸⁹ as did the Bönestad stone (Sö121), commemorating a man who presumably died in the estuary of the river Daugava (i tuna asu).¹⁹⁰ Finland, Tavastland, and what is probably Viborg are mentioned once each, *Holmgard* three and *Gardar* even eight times, though two of the latter are of doubtful provenance.¹⁹¹

183 Zilmer 2005: 38–46, 206.

184 Zilmer 2005: 71–72 Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 23–52.

185 Zilmer 2005: 165–167; Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 33–34.

186 Zilmer 2005: 167–169; Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 34–35.

187 Zilmer 2005: 171.

188 Zilmer 2005: 163–165; Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 36.

189 Zilmer 2005: 172–175.

190 Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 32.

191 Zilmer 2005: 139–163; Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 37–43.

It is striking that neither *Kúrland* nor *Eysýsla*, both common in other Scandinavian writings, were mentioned on the runic stones. There is only one dubious reference to *isilu* and another to *alasuslu*, perhaps referring to *Eysýsla* and *Aðalsýsla* known from other sources (Vestra Ledinge, U 518, and Gudings).¹⁹² One more stone in Sjonhem church mentions *uitau* (G 135), perhaps meaning *Ventspils* (German *Vindau*) on the estuary of the River Venta in Couronia.¹⁹³

Instead of *Kúrland* or *Eysýsla*, there occurs a toponym that seems to refer to Sambia or Semgallia. The best example is the Mervalla runic stone (Sö198), where a dead husband Sveinn was commemorated by the fact that he often sailed to *Simkala* around (or near) Domesnäs (til simkala um tumisnis).¹⁹⁴ Because of phonetic similarity and the mentioning of Domesnäs (present-day Kolka, the northern end of the Kurzeme peninsula), *Simkala* has always been interpreted as Semgallia, although the latter presumably occurred in other Scandinavian sources only once, and is geopolitically not very likely to have priority for Scandinavian communication routes (see Chapter 3). Around Kolka it is possible to sail both to Saaremaa (*Samzala*?) and, along the River Lielupē, to historical Semgallia. In saga literature, “um” can often be understood as “near”, leaving open the possibility that the area where Sveinn used to sail was actually somewhere in the Kurzeme peninsula. Both Saaremaa and Couronia were, according to other sources, frequent destinations for Middle-Swedish people, both Vikings and merchants.

The same toponym seems to have occurred on a small 11th-century copper box found in Sigtuna (UFV 1912,8), with a runic inscription according to which the box, with scales in it, was sold to its later owner by a man from *Semskum* (af simskum moni i ... oti). Another reference to this area can perhaps be found on a now missing Grönsta stone (Sö 110), where the person commemorated used to travel to *Sæmi* (faur i saimi).¹⁹⁵

4.2.12 *Different Place Names in Different Times*

The Scandinavian sources, including saga literature and runic stones, differ both geographically and chronologically, thus implying the possibility that Eastern Baltic coastal areas might have been known under different names depending on the area where the observers came from, and the time when these names were used.

192 Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 34–35.

193 Zilmer 2005: 179–181; Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 32.

194 Zilmer 2005: 175–177.

195 Zilmer 2005: 175–179.

The choice of toponyms used in narratives varied from one century to another. All Icelandic sources that referred to semi-mythological events before the Viking Age or in the beginning of this era preferred toponyms connected with the northern half of the Eastern Baltic: *Estland*, *Eysýsla*, and *Aðalsýsla*, in addition to *Finnland*, *Garðaríki*, *Aldeigjuborg*, and *Bjarmaland*. It clearly indicates that communication routes that dominated the activities of this period ran from Middle Sweden to Åland or to the Estonian islands, and further east along the Gulf of Finland. In the *History of Norway*, *Estland* and different parts of it were mentioned six times, while *Kúrland* and *Finland* were only mentioned once each. The earliest kings' sagas of *Heimskringla* do not mention *Kúrland* at all. Still, *Kúrland* appeared on the scene in the 9th century as well, first in sources that were written down in present-day Germany – even when the actors of these narratives involved Swedes. Saxo's decision to use ancient sources also included *Livland* or *Hellespont*, which otherwise were seldom referred to in Icelandic sagas.

At this time, *Kúrland* probably had more relevance for the southern coast of the Baltic Sea, and the existence of a Scandinavian colony in Grobiņa can be seen as a sign of a communication route starting from there. Accordingly, in the nine saga-chapters of his book the Danish chronicler Saxo referred to *Kúrland* comparatively frequently, actually more often than he mentioned *Estland* or *Finland*. Still, it is most conspicuous that, although using earlier saga literature whose motifs can often be compared with those used by Snorri or other Icelanders, Saxo completely avoided mentioning Saaremaa (or *Eysýsla*). As was demonstrated above, Saaremaa was one of the most frequently used Eastern Baltic toponyms according to other Scandinavian sources. It is likely, therefore, that the unexpectedly frequent use of the toponym *Kúrland* by Saxo can be explained by the possibility that, for him or for the sources he used, the name also embraced the Island of Saaremaa – which may be linked with the fact that, according to Baltic Finnic tradition, the people or social group called *kuralased* inhabited both these areas.

As was demonstrated above, the toponym *Samland* very seldom appeared in the sagas that were written down in Iceland, and not at all in narratives that probably referred to the pre-Viking or early Viking Age. None of the kings' sagas in *Heimskringla* mentioned a land called *Semland*, or something similar, neither was this toponym known by the anonymous author of the *History of Norway*. The first and last proper mention of *Seimgalir* in the sagas was connected with a fabulous narrative from the 11th century – when Yngvar the Traveller, together with Prince Onund suppressed a revolt against Swedish taxation there. It seems to coincide with the appearance of the toponym *Simkala* on the 11th-century runic stones; on the other hand, the story itself

may have its roots in the narrative given in *Ynglinga Saga*, about the kings Yngvar and Onund arranging raids against *Austrvegr*, this time meaning *Estland*.¹⁹⁶ *Samland* also occurred here and there later in saga literature, but it then seemed to refer to the Prussian area on the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea.

Saxo's choice of Eastern Baltic place names differed considerably from those of the Icelandic authors, not only because of his mysterious silence about *Eysýsla* and frequent use of *Ruthenia* and *Curland*, but also in respect to the use of the toponyms *Semland*, or variants of it. Saxo's main interest was the Vends and the wars against them, which may offer a probable explanation why the area on the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea – *Semland* – was also relevant for him. The southern half of the Baltic Sea was where the Danish kingdom was building up its superiority starting from the 10th, but mainly during the 11th–12th centuries. Saxo looked at the eastern coast from the south towards the north, while the Icelandic authors generally looked the opposite way.

Perhaps to justify Danish ambitions to subjugate the Vendic areas, such as characterised Saxo's own time, Saxo also offered a narrative on how the Danes conquered the Sambians some time in the 960s. According to this, the Danes decided to marry local women and stay in the country, and the locals later used to count their descent from the Danes.¹⁹⁷

In the historical part of *Gesta Danorum*, Saxo wrote about the Danish king Knut the Holy (c. 1042–1086), who in his youth, that is, in the middle of the 11th century fought successfully against pirates, and as part of that campaign was victorious over Sambians and Estonians (*Sembicis atque Estonicis*).¹⁹⁸ Knut reinforced his campaign in the east when he became the king in the 1080s, and was now said to have destroyed the lands of the Couronians, Sambians, and Estonians (*Curorum, Sembonumque ac Estonum*).¹⁹⁹ It seems likely, from these statements, that the toponyms *Estonia*, *Semland*, and *Curonia* were simply indicating the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea for Saxo, without any realisation of the exact difference between the varying ethnicities or their territories there. Like Adam of Bremen, who in the late 11th century divided the Eastern Baltic between *Semland*, *Chourland*, and *Aestland*, Saxo was probably somewhat confused by these toponyms, especially by the extent of *Chourland* between the other two.

196 The Saga of the Ynglings, 32–33.

197 Saxo Grammaticus, 10.5.

198 Saxo Grammaticus, 11.8.

199 Saxo Grammaticus, 11.11.1.

In this respect it is striking that once in the mythological part of his book, Saxo listed a people called the *Samgali* together with the *Sembi* and *Curi*, although *Samgali* or something similar appeared nowhere else in his chronicle.²⁰⁰ It was definitely the same ethnonym as *Samkala* mentioned on the runic stones, or *Seimgalir* in the *Saga of Yngvar the Traveller*, which can be applied to the historical Sengallia, or perhaps to the same area as Couronia. By the late 12th century, when Saxo wrote his opus, the name had obviously lost its relevance, and might have only further confused Saxo's previous vague geographical knowledge of the Eastern Baltic.

It seems likely that, at least in certain areas along the eastern coast of the Baltic, different names were used for different ethnic groups. In this respect, present political borders obviously often hinder researchers from seeing the complex situation a thousand years back. One can presume that the main criterion differentiating ethnic groups along the long Couronian coast was their membership of different language families, at least where, as far as we know archaeologically, this was followed by different social structures, mythology, gender roles, and other aspects of societies. Baltic-speaking inhabitants in later Prussia and southern Couronia, with their quite hierarchical social structure, might have had much more in common in the eyes of contemporary foreigners, than the same Couronians with their Finnic-speaking neighbours having a much more collegial power structure, although the latter lived mixed with the former in the territory of present-day Latvia. Equally obvious is the great similarity between Saaremaa and several areas in present-day Couronia, suggesting that the inhabitants in these regions might have shared the name attributed to them by Viking Age Scandinavians, although later in history these areas were divided between ethnically Baltic Latvia and ethnically Finnic Estonia. It can only be added that the Viking Age material culture of Saaremaa differed considerably from most of mainland Estonia,²⁰¹ although a similar language and society might have been reason enough to call the inhabitants of the islands Estonians, at least in some of the written sources.

Names connected with *Sam* and *Kur* can thus refer to these ethnic differences, but may also have dominated in different Scandinavian areas depending on which group the particular area mainly encountered. In this way, *Samland* and *Kúrland* can refer to approximately the same coastal zone of the whole Eastern Baltic, just as Estonia has probably, according to circumstances, sometimes functioned as a common term for lands on the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea – the East Land – and sometimes just indicated a particular region of them.

200 Saxo Grammaticus, 6.5.14.

201 Selirand 1974; Mägi 2002.

4.2.13 *From Common Cultural Milieu to Religious Conflict*

The sagas seem to indicate Scandinavians' active engagement in eastern politics as early as pre-Viking times and the early Viking Age, which differed from the late Viking Age in several essential aspects. Firstly, in the 7th–9th centuries it is difficult to speak of Russia as the eastern partner for Scandinavians – the areas where the narratives of legendary sagas took place were predominantly inhabited by Finnic-speaking peoples.²⁰² The Slavic components among the inhabitants of the vast areas of present-day north-western Russia became clearly obvious from the 10th century onwards. *Austrvegr*, and probably also *Garðaríki*, in its original meaning definitely included the Eastern Baltic areas, particularly the northern half of this region. The coasts of the Eastern Baltic attracted early Swedish and Danish kings presumably not only as possible areas to loot, but more as areas where it was necessary to establish some kind of dependency to guarantee safe passage further to the east.

It is also noteworthy that in sagas which probably refer to the early Viking Age the northern Eastern Baltic area appears similar to Scandinavia – there were also heroes and kings, whose daughters Old Nordic kings from time to time married. As for Saxo Grammaticus, it has often been suggested that, writing at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, he used the stories of the Eastern Baltic to justify Denmark's political ambitions towards the east, which in Saxo's time became more and more obvious.²⁰³ Nevertheless, the subjects and attitudes visible in the stories of Saxo's first nine books often resemble those in Snorri's *Heimskringla* or in the legendary sagas. By the 12th century these attitudes had completely changed.

The Scandinavian countries, with the new kingdoms of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, were converted to Christianity from the second half of the 10th to the 11th centuries. This led to a dramatic change in Old Nordic written sources' attitudes towards the still pagan peoples in the Eastern Baltic. First of all, they were now primarily perceived as pagans. The number of stories where activity can be dated to the 11th or later centuries and where the scenery was the Eastern Baltic, is considerably smaller than in the more mythological narratives referring to the Viking Age or earlier. The common cultural milieu around the northern half of the Baltic Sea had gone and people in the Eastern Baltic buffer zone between the Scandinavian kingdoms in the west, and the Russian state in the east, were only seldom remembered in written sources. Saxo Grammaticus vividly reflected the political situation in the late 12th century with his remarks about "barbarous" tribes who "dwell around" in the east.

202 For an overview of the ethnic composition in these areas see Callmer 2000.

203 Mickevičius 1994.

Christian motives and crusading ideology gradually took over the former more or less respectful or at least equal attitudes. Starting from the second half of the 11th century, plundering raids against the Eastern Baltic were normally justified by the need to spread Christianity. Writing of the Danish king Knut attacking Couronia, Estonia, and Sambia in the 1080s, Saxo Grammaticus found it important to emphasise that he did so mainly to spread the Christian faith and improve his own reputation, and less to satisfy his greed.²⁰⁴ *Knytlinga Saga* talks of the Danish jarl Erik, who carried out endless plundering raids against heathens in *Austrvegr*, but let Christians and merchants go free and, strangely enough, because of this he was “renowned and popular” throughout the whole of *Austrvegr*.²⁰⁵ Snorri has King Valdemar I say, in the second half of the 12th century, after he had met resistance to his army in southern Norway: “...and it is more my inclination to go with the army to *Austrvegr* against the heathens, of whom we have enough before us in *Austrvegr*,²⁰⁶ than to kill Christian people here...”, yet without following his inclination immediately.²⁰⁷

The new times were also obvious in the attitude to intermarriage between Scandinavian and Eastern Baltic or *Garðaríki* chieftains’ or petty kings’ families, as they occurred in the legendary sagas. Although dynastic marriages between Scandinavian and Russian royal families occurred, sagas seldom mention Nordic 11th–12th-century potentates marrying high-ranking girls from *Austrvegr*. The story of the Swedish widow-queen Sigrid, which occurred at some point at the beginning of the 11th century and thus marked the period in which attitudes were transforming, is significant in this respect. Two suitors came to her, her stepson Harald and “another king”, a certain “Vissevald from *Garðaríki* in the east”. Sigrid received them well in the beginning, but then burned them and their retainers in a great hall. “Sigrid said that in this way she was going to break kinglets of the habit of visiting her to ask her hand in marriage”.²⁰⁸ However, Katrin, a daughter of Danish duke Knud Lavard was (as late as in the 1130s) said to have been married to someone in *Austrvegr*, while her two sisters, in comparison, were the wives of another high-ranking Dane and the king of Norway.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, both Vissevald and the unnamed husband

204 Saxo Grammaticus, 11.11.1.

205 *Knytlinga Saga*, 70.

206 In connection with the Danish medieval ambitions, the term *Austrvegr* could also embrace the Vends.

207 Magnus Erlingsson’s *Saga*, 27.

208 The *Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason*, 43.

209 *Knytlinga Saga*, 93.

from *Austrvegr* were more likely Christian noblemen from Russia than heathen chieftains from the Eastern Baltic.

The changes that had started in the second half of the 11th century became especially evident in the 1100s. Political organisations in the countries around the Eastern Baltic had developed, markedly diminishing the importance of the plundering economy in these states. The Viking raids that earlier had played an unavoidable role in gaining status for young men of higher social rank were gradually replaced by more centrally organised military expeditions, frequently with the objective of conquering new territories. Still, the Norwegian Jarl Eirik, for instance, sailed to *Austrvegr* and attacked Estonia in 1185, because, according to *Sverre's Saga*, he was short of resources. He pillaged in places called Vikar and Tunta, and returned with abundant booty.²¹⁰

Written sources indicate increasing military activity between the Eastern Baltic and Scandinavia again towards the end of the 12th century. Saxo Grammaticus mentions the Estonians and Couronians' joint plundering raid to Blekinge in present-day southern Sweden, then part of Denmark, in 1170;²¹¹ in the *Knytlinga Saga*, the plunderers were described simply as Couronians (for more detail see topic 4.2.8.).²¹² The German chronicler Henry the Livonian contributed several descriptions of the Saaremaa-Estonians' and Couronians' Viking-style forays to Scandinavia in the beginning of the 13th century and even as late as the 1220s. Several sources have recorded the conquest of Sigtuna in 1187, although they mention different ethnicities, or just "Eastern men" as responsible for it (see detail in Section 7.1.2.3.).

4.3 What Was *Rus'*?

Several essential aspects concerning the Eastern Baltic areas in the Viking Age are apparent in the discussion about early *Rus'*. Like *Garðaríki*, the toponym *Rus'* might have meant different areas in the course of time, or be understood in variable ways, depending on the writers and their background.

4.3.1 *Rus' as Ethnonym*

A whole library has been written about the origin of the name *Rus'*, still without clear consensus on this question. Supporters of a theory, according to which the name *Rus'* is of Russian, i.e. Slavic origin, point to the fact that the

²¹⁰ Sverres Saga, 113.

²¹¹ Saxo Grammaticus, 14.40.

²¹² Knytlinga Saga, 123.

name *Rus'* seems not to appear in central Swedish runic stones. They believe that *Rus'* as an ethnonym appeared only in the Kiev-Rus state, and can be connected with the name of some river (most frequently Ros, the tributary of the Dnepr, is mentioned), or may even have the same root as Rugen (German *Rügen*, Latin *Rugia*), the island inhabited by Western Slavs. Some more radical theories even try to connect it with names appearing in some Syrian sources or in the Bible.²¹³

The Russian etymologist Ageeva argues that the name *Rus'* in Slavic languages belongs linguistically to the same group of ethnonyms as *Ves'*, *Yam'*, *Perm'*, *Lib'*, *Chud'*, and other names in present-day northern Russia, being used in the singular, in feminine form, and predominantly denoting Finno-Ugrian people. It cannot, therefore, originate from central or southern areas of Russia, where ethnonyms were in the masculine form and in the plural (in most cases, ending with *-i* or *-ene*, e.g. *Varjagi*, *Slovene*).²¹⁴

The supporters of the Scandinavian origin of this name normally refer to its connection with the verb *rōps* (to row) or with the noun *rōpR* or *rōpz* (the rowers or members of an expedition of rowing ships), which appears in the toponym Roslagen.²¹⁵ Historical Roslagen (mentioned in 1493 as *Rodzlagen*, later *Roden*) is a narrow coastal district in Uppland in Middle Sweden immediately north of present-day Stockholm, partly covering the entrance to Lake Mälaren. It was also the district with most extensive mutual contact with the Baltic Finns, visible in both archaeological as well as toponymic evidence, which may be the reason why the name was, according to this theory, taken over by Baltic Finns as *Ruotsi* (Finnish) or *Rootsi* (Estonian).

The scenario seems plausible, but with some reservations. Contacts between Middle Sweden and Baltic Finns had already been common in the Bronze Age,²¹⁶ and these two ethnic groups definitely did not meet each other only on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, where it could have made sense to call the foreigners "the rowers". Although it is not completely impossible, the question however remains: why should Baltic Finns visiting the area of present-day Sweden, or even settling down there, call people there by this name, assuming, and with good reason, that they understood its meaning? Whatever the case, it is possible that only some of the Swedes, those who did undertake sea expeditions, were given this name, thus creating a sort of parallelism to the term

213 For an overview of different theories see Ageeva 1990: 116–139; Thulin 2000; Duczko 2004: 19–24.

214 Ageeva 1990: 123–124.

215 Ekbo 2000.

216 Jaanusson 1981; Bolin 2004; Feldt 2005.

Viking (and perhaps Cour, *kuri*). Similarly to the term Vikings, the *Ruots-Rus'*-term probably also covered people of other ethnic groups, insofar as they acted in a similar manner. What term was used by Baltic Finns for the “real” Swedes in these early times, before the term *Ruotsi/Rootsi* was extended to the whole country, remains unknown. The Slavs took over the name *Rus'* either from the Baltic Finns,²¹⁷ or directly from the members of the group that identified themselves as *Rus'*.

Several researchers earlier put forward an idea, according to which *Rus'* was originally not an ethnic but rather a social term, and might have indicated ethnically different people from coastal areas around the northern part of the Baltic Sea.²¹⁸ According to which district of this area a particular researcher has been more familiar with, the north Estonian coast and the Åland Archipelago in particular have been suggested as the most suitable candidates.²¹⁹ Although Russian chronicles make a case for the Varangian background of the ruling Rurikid dynasty, in these writings *Rus'* is sometimes equated with *Varjagi* (Varangians), and sometimes, especially in the beginning of the chronicle, distinguished from them.

Recounting the legend about inviting rulers from abroad, the *Primary Chronicle*²²⁰ mentions that the messengers were sent to *Rus'*; “these particular Varangians were known as *Rus'*, just as some are called Swedes [*Sveas*], and others Norwegians, English, and Gotlanders, for they were thus named”. It is also worth mentioning that the *Rus'* were invited only after some Varangians, but not necessarily the same *Rus'*, had earlier taxed the country and been driven out by the locals.²²¹ Here the *Rus'* were clearly considered different from the *Sveas*, the inhabitants of Middle Sweden. *Varjagi* were also mentioned later in the same *Primary Chronicle*, again probably in order to indicate the difference between the *Rus'* and the inhabitants of different parts of Scandinavia (including *Sveas*?), who became active in the area of present-day north-west Russia during these centuries.

Later mention of *Varjagi* in the same *letopis* most probably indicates close contacts with “other” *Varjagi*, that is, not the *Rus'*, but inhabitants of different parts of Scandinavia (including *Sveas*?), who became active in the area of

217 Melnikova 2011: 136–137.

218 Ageeva 1990: 129 and references.

219 Respectively, Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991; Callmer 2000.

220 The *Russian Primary Chronicle* is also called *Nestor's Chronicle*, or, according to its opening sentence, the *Chronicle of Bygone Years*. The oldest version is believed to have been written down in the early 12th century.

221 The Russian Primary Chronicle, years 6367–6370 (859–862).

present-day north-west Russia during these centuries. This difference is well demonstrated in the description of a campaign by Prince Igor in 944, when he had “...called together many warriors: *Varjagi*, *Rus’* and *Poljane*, *Slovene* and *Chud’*...”.²²²

Alf Thulin has demonstrated that the name *Varank* (in Islamic sources), *Varangoi* (in Byzantine sources), *Varjagi* (in Russian chronicles), or *Væringjar* (in Old Icelandic literature) did not appear in written documents before the 11th century. He believes that the original meaning of *Rus’* as Scandinavians started to change towards the end of the 10th century, when the term *Varjagi* was taken into use to differentiate Scandinavians from *Rus’*, which now meant an ethnically mixed Slavic-Scandinavian upper class. Chroniclers of the Russian texts thus wanted to point to the difference between the original *Rus’*, and the *Rus’* of their own times, thereby making use of both terms.²²³ If we accept the late appearance of the term *Varjagi*, the use of this name beside the name *Rus’* in Russian chronicles can however also be understood as simply an attempt to differentiate *Rus’* from other Norsemen – exactly as was stated at the beginning of the *Primary Chronicle*.²²⁴

4.3.2 *First Mention of Rus’ – The Story in the Annales Bertiniani*

A source that has mainly been presented as proving the Scandinavian background of *Rus’* was written by the bishop of Troyes, Prudentius, in the 9th century, and is called the *Annales Bertiniani*. According to this, in 839 a group of men calling themselves *Rhos* had arrived at the residence of the German emperor Louis the Pious in Ingelheim, close to present-day Mainz-am-Rhein, together with envoys sent by the Byzantine emperor, Theophilos. The quite high-ranking Byzantine envoys had, according to the chronicler, the purpose of confirming a treaty of peace and friendship. The text reads further:²²⁵

He also sent with the envoys some men who said they – meaning their whole people – were called *Rhos*, and had been sent to him [i.e. Theophilos] by their king whose name was *chaganus*, for the sake of friendship, so they claimed. Theophilos requested in his letter that the Emperor in his goodness might grant them safe conducts to travel through his empire and any help of practical assistance they needed to return home, for the route by which they had reached Constantinople had taken them

²²² After Ageeva 1990: 124.

²²³ Thulin 2000.

²²⁴ See also Melnikova 2011: 71.

²²⁵ After Duczko 2004: 17.

through barbarous tribes that were very fierce and savage and Theophilus did not wish them to return that way, in case some disaster befell them. When the Emperor investigated more closely the reason for their coming here, he discovered that they belonged to the people of Swedes. He suspected that they had really been sent as spies to this kingdom of ours rather than as seekers of our friendship, so he decided to keep them with him until he could find out for certain whether or not they had come in good faith. He lost no time in sending a letter to Theophilus through the same envoys to tell him all this, and to add that he had received them willingly for the sake of his friendship for Theophilus and that if they were found to be genuine, he would supply them with means to return to their own fatherland without any risk of danger and send them home with every assistance, but if not, he would send them with envoys of ours back to Theophilus for him to deal with as he might think fit.

The distrustful way Louis the Pious received the *Rhos* has been remarked upon by several researchers. Wladyslaw Duczko has suggested that the secret objective of the *Rhos* might have been to persuade the Danes to cooperate with Emperor Theophilus in his fight against Islam; the Frankish emperor, because of the great instability of the politics of his time, had every reason to suspect every unusual envoy. Duczko believed that the fact itself – to have made such a massive detour, instead of just going back the same way as they had reached Constantinople, claiming that it had suddenly turned dangerous – would have raised suspicion among the Franks. That the *Rhos* were mentioned at all in *Annales* indicated, he assumed, that their objectives were considered dangerous, or at least unusual.²²⁶

As Duczko admits himself, there is no real proof for his theory, which can simply be treated as one of the possible explanations for what was going on in Ingelheim in 839. One of the weakest points of his theory is probably that it seems to overestimate the political power of *Rhos*, a political entity that, according to other sources, seems to have not even existed in such early times. However, it is possible to explain the episode in 839 in a more direct way, without including notions of high-level political games.

Johan Callmer has pointed out that the confusion in Ingelheim seems to be caused by the fact that men who called themselves *Rhos*, and thus identified themselves as such, were thought by the Franks to be Swedes. The *Annales* indicate that they were similar to Swedes, rather than Swedes in the ordinary

²²⁶ Duczko 2004: 10–59.

meaning of this term.²²⁷ This raises the question of language as probably the simplest explanation of the confusion. The years of the reign of Louis the Pious (813/814–840) were characterised by wars with the Danes, and attempts to send missions to Sweden in order to Christianise people. A member of the Danish royal family, Harald Krak, had enjoyed shelter and support from Louis, and Ansgar the bishop had completed his mission in Birka in Middle Sweden, appointed by Louis, only eight years before the appearance of the *Rhos* in Ingelheim. It is very hard to believe that no member of the royal court had recognised Swedish, if the *Rhos* had spoken this language. Instead, their Swedish origin was uncovered later, after a special investigation, and was probably based on either their own, or someone else's explanation of the location of their region, on their ability to speak Swedish/some specific Old Norse dialect as well, or perhaps on the assessment of their clothes, weapons, or customs. Although apparently Swedish to outside observers, they did not identify themselves as Swedes, and probably did not use Old Norse when talking to each other.

Many 9th–10th-century sources mentioning *Rus'* locate them in northern areas (see below), thus probably to the early territory of *Garðaríki*. The *Rhos* in Ingelheim must thus have travelled to Constantinople either from Staraya Ladoga or along the River Daugava, along the River Dnepr and over the Black Sea. As was described in the letter sent by Theophilus to Louis, in the first half of the 9th century this was still a dangerous road running through “barbarous tribes”. An opportunity to travel together with Byzantine envoys, under the protection of the mighty Byzantine emperor, must have been many times safer even if taking longer, and no wonder the *Rhos* had accepted the benevolent offer. As indicated in the *Annales*, there were only a small number of *Rhos* men, to whom travelling without escort might have been dangerous in any case. The possibility that returning the same way might have included long waiting periods in addition to the dangers cannot be excluded either; the seasonality of North-European communication (see Chapter 3) perhaps meant that the route via Ingelheim was not expected to take so much longer anyway. And if the *Rhos* had come to the emperor in Constantinople, most likely to conclude some treaty concerning trade, they might also have been attracted by making some contacts in the Frankish court.

The name for the king of the *Rhos* – *chaganus* – has also provoked speculation, with no generally accepted opinion on this matter. The title *chaganus* seems to refer to Khazars, which, however, is unlikely for several reasons – mainly because the title was considered the highest among nomadic people,

227 Callmer 2000: 51–52.

and hardly applicable for a political power that had only recently appeared to the scene. The information, on the other hand, may be reliable, since the same title for a *Rus'* leader is also mentioned by some other Islamic sources from the 10th century onward.²²⁸ Duczko has demonstrated how the title *kagan* was still utilised, then as an archaic denomination, in 11th-century Kiev-Rus.²²⁹ Whatever the title, the power of the leader of the early *Rus'* could hardly be compared with that of the powerful *kagan* of the Khazars, as will be demonstrated below.

The envoys in Ingelheim might have simply used the term *khagan* as the most suitable, in their opinion, for explaining the power of their leader or leaders to the Byzantines, and then repeated the same to the Franks. Even for the Byzantines, the *Rus'* might have been quite unfamiliar in the late 830s, or at least they were still described as such more than 20 years later, during their first attack on Byzantium (860 or, according to *Nestor's Chronicle*, 866).

Photios, the patriarch of Constantinople, who wrote of the attack, described the *Rhos* as brutal people who had arrived from "the farthest North", and who were

...an obscure nation, a nation of no account, a nation ranked among slaves, unknown ... a nation dwelling somewhere far from our country, barbarous, nomadic, armed with arrogance, unwatched, unchallenged, leaderless...²³⁰

Thorir Jonsson Hraundal has pointed to the fact that although a *khagan* was mentioned, no informants talk of a *khaganat*.²³¹ Still, some researchers have constructed a vision of a "Rus' *khaganate*" as the earliest phase of the *Rus'* state. Duczko tries to prove in his book that the *khaganate* had its centre in Staraya Ladoga, was clearly Scandinavian-dominated, and that the first attack on Constantinople was initiated from there.²³² However, the earliest archaeological layers in Staraya Ladoga provide no real support for this interpretation, demonstrating hardly more impact from Scandinavia than appeared in other coastal areas in the northern half of the Baltic Sea in this period. It is technically difficult to believe that attacks on Constantinople started from

228 E.g. by Ibn Roste, by Gardizi, or by the author of "Anonymous Notes", see *Vostochnye istochniki*, 47–48, 55, 58.

229 Duczko 2004: 25–26.

230 The Homilies of Photios, 98.

231 Hraundal 2013: 178.

232 Duczko 2004: 83–86.

Staraya Ladoga, as Duczko sees it, especially when taking into account the very complicated river system south of Lake Ilmen. A Scandinavian bridgehead in Kiev, that according to Russian chronicles, was established in 862, is a much likelier Viking military post from which to arrange attacks on the coasts of the Black Sea.

4.3.3 *Rūs and Saqāliba*

In a number of documents, *ar-Rūs* have been considered as living next to, or mixed with people called *al-Saqāliba*. Many researchers with a Slavic background treat the ethnonym *Saqāliba* as denoting only Slavs,²³³ which, even if it is true for most cases, should be questioned in others.²³⁴ According to Islamic sources, the *Saqāliba* live both in the south and the north – their adaptation to cold, their use of the sauna, their custom of drinking beer, using wooden dishes, and breeding pigs was repeated from one source to another. In addition to southern and western districts, the *Saqāliba* clearly inhabited the vast northern areas of what is now Russia, but what in the 9th–10th centuries was still mainly populated by Finno-Ugric-speaking peoples. Even more, Ibn Fadlān, one of the most cited 10th-century Arab writers, associates the *Saqāliba* with the Volga Bulgars. It has, therefore, been a widely accepted opinion among other researchers that the term *Saqāliba* was utilised by Arabs when depicting all people with a fair complexion and fair hair as soon as the name was introduced,²³⁵ thus certainly also embracing the Baltic Finnic and Baltic population of present-day Russia.

Most Viking Age sources talk of *Rūs* supremacy over the *Saqāliba*, who often work for the *Rūs*, and from whom the *Rūs* collect tribute. However, in the earliest writings *Rūs* might even be a part of the *Saqāliba*, a possibility that has often been pointed out by scholars supporting the Slavic origin of the *Rūs*. In his *Book of Roads and Kingdoms*, the Persian scholar Ibn Khurradādhbih wrote around 830 of *ar-Rūs* merchants, who were:²³⁶

...a tribe from among *as-Saqāliba*. They bring furs of beavers and of black foxes and swords from the most distant parts of the *Saqāliba* [land] to the sea of *Rum* [the Black Sea], [where] the ruler of *ar-Rum* [the Byzantium Emperor] levies tithes on them. If they want, they travel on the *Itil* [the Volga River], the river of the *as-Saqāliba* ... On occasion they bring their

233 E.g. Urbancik 2012.

234 See e.g. Korpela 2014: 42.

235 Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991; Duczko 2004: 22; Korpela 2014: 42.

236 Cited after Duczko 2004: 22.

merchandise on camels from Gurjan to Baghdad [where] *as-Saqāliba* eunuchs serve them as interpreters. They claim to be Christians and pay head tax.

Since the term *as-Saqāliba* seems to be used in a very broad sense in the mid-9th century, and clearly indicates northern people, it cannot be very likely that only Slavic-speakers were meant by this word. *Saqāliba* slaves were valued in Arab slave markets because of their fair complexion and fair hair, which also indicates northern people, first of all probably Baltic Finns (who in the Viking Age inhabited a much broader area than nowadays), Balts, and Scandinavians.²³⁷ Eunuchs used as interpreters in Baghdad would thus be more likely to talk some Finno-Ugrian, Old Norse, or Baltic dialect than Slavic. However, the entire story of the *Saqāliba* could be the result of some of the informants' subjective experiences, and might not be applicable to all cases. This subjectivity is also hinted at by the statement, that the *ar-Rūs* claimed themselves to be Christians – which was certainly possible for all areas around the northern half of the Baltic Sea, but not very widespread in the 840s. In other Viking Age sources, *Rūs* appear predominantly pagan, although Christianity might have been much more widespread in the 10th century, compared to the mid-9th century.

The meaning of *al-Saqāliba* probably developed in the course of time, as did other ethnonyms. Around 900 another Persian scholar Ibn al-Faqīh wrote of two sorts of *Saqāliba*: the dark ones, who live close to the sea (the Adriatic Sea?), and the fair and beautiful ones, who live on dry land.²³⁸ It is also interesting to mention, in this connection, that Ibn al-Faqīh, who wrote half a century later than Ibn Khurradādhbih, mentioned only *Saqāliba*, but no *Rūs*. His *Saqāliba*, perhaps the “fair and beautiful ones”, were described as practising trade along approximately the same lines as the *Rūs* did according to Ibn Khurradādhbih.²³⁹

As for the *Saqālib* merchants, they bring fox and beaver pelts from the depths of their country to the sea of *Rum*, where the Byzantine king

237 Blonde people live predominantly around the northern half of the Baltic Sea, including the areas that were mainly populated by Baltic Finnic peoples in the Viking Age. The percentage of blondes among eastern Finno-Ugrians and Viking Age Eastern Slavic peoples was presumably much lower.

238 Vostochnye istochniki, 34–35.

239 Ibn al-Faqīh, after Ibn Fadlān *et al*, 114 and Vostochnye istochniki, 35. See also Hraundal 2013: 63–68.

imposes a ten per cent tax on them. Then they go by sea to Samkarsh of the Jews. From there, they either go on to the river of the *Saqāliba* (normally identified as not a particular river, but the whole river system) until they come to the gulf of *Hazar* (the Azov Sea?), where the ruler imposes a tax of ten per cent.

According to most Viking Age sources, the *Saqāliba* did not practise international trade, which seems to have been reserved for *Rūs*. However, the Jewish merchant Ibrāhīm Ibn Ya'qūb, who travelled in Central Europe, mentioned in 965 that both the *Rūs* and *Saqāliba* transported slaves, silk, and furs from Krakow to Prague. The *Rūs* mentioned by him reached the lands of the Prussians with their boats from the west, thus here clearly referring to the *Rūs* as people on the coasts of the Baltic Sea.²⁴⁰

The works of these scholars thus reinforce the possibility that the *Rūs*, at least in the first half of the Viking Age, were just considered part of the *Saqāliba*, which can be seen as correlating well with the ethnic and linguistic confusion about the *Rhos* in Ingelheim at approximately the same time. The probable multi-ethnic character of the *Rūs* can be further demonstrated in a very brief mention of Ahmad Al-Ya'qubi's *Book of the Lands* in 891, according to which *al-Majūs* (general term for pagans in Islamic sources), who were called *ar-Rūs*, ransacked the city of Seville in 843 or 844.²⁴¹ Since this attack is normally associated with Vikings, here the term *Rūs* seems to indicate Scandinavians, or at least some northern people.

4.3.4 *Islamic Sources and the Island of Rūs*

The description of *Rūs* underwent dramatic metamorphosis in the flux of the Viking Age and following centuries. In the context here, mainly 9th–10th-century narratives are of interest, while after that the name *Rūs* gradually started to

²⁴⁰ Ibn Fadlān *et al*, 166; Vostochnye istochniki, 79. Several Islamic sources from the 10th century refer to *Rūs* as “a huge nation”, divided into different groups. They describe in detail how the fleets and armies of these *Rūs* attacked and annihilated Khazars, Azerbaijanis, and people of other areas near the Caspian Sea, as well as the Bulgars (Mas'ūdi and Mis-kawayh, Ibn Hawqal; see Ibn Fadlān *et al*, 144–152, 178). Some researchers, notably Thorir Jonsson Hraundal, have quite convincingly demonstrated that these *Rūs* were most likely some Turkic people, and not Scandinavians (Hraundal 2013). Logistically, it is difficult to imagine great fleets of Scandinavians sailing either from the North or from Kiev to the Caspian Sea (see also Chapter 3). It cannot be excluded that we are dealing here with two originally similar sounding ethnonyms that were fused together by Islamic authors.

²⁴¹ Vostochnye istochniki, 38; Hraundal 2013: 68–70.

indicate the Slavonised or Slavic upper-class in Kiev-Rus, and finally started to be utilised for the whole nation.

Earlier Islamic sources seem to agree that the *Rūs* (*ar-Rusija*) lived on an island, promontory, or peninsula²⁴² that in some writings was situated in a lake, in some others in a sea. The Persian Ibn Rusta wrote, shortly after 903, a longer description of this people:²⁴³

As for the *ar-Rusija*, they live on an island, surrounded by a lake. The island, where they live, takes three days to walk across and is covered with forests and wetlands, unhealthy and so waterlogged that if a man only steps on the soil, it quivers from the abundance of its moisture. They have a king, who is called *khaqan-rus*. They attack the *Saqāliba*, using ships to reach them, they land and capture them, take them to Khazaran and Bulgar and sell them there. They have no cultivated fields but they live only on what they get from the *Saqāliba* lands. When a son is born, he [the *Rūs*] gives an unsheathed sword as a present to the new-born, throws it in front of him and says, "I shall not leave you with any property, and you will not have anything but what you can gain with this sword".

They do not have dwellings, or villages, or cultivated fields. Their only occupation is to trade in sable, squirrel and other furs that they sell to those who desire them. They get paid in coins that they hide in their belt. They carry clean clothes and their men adorn themselves with golden bracelets. They treat their slaves well, taking care of their clothes, because they trade [in them]. They have many towns, and they live in freedom. They show respect towards guests, and treat well any strangers who seek refuge with them, as well as those [foreigners] who often stay with them, and don't let any of their own people insult or oppress them. When someone insults or oppresses a foreigner, they help and protect him. Their swords are Frankish [*Sulaimān*]. When someone from their clan faces an enemy, they all confront him. And [then] there is no disagreement among them, but they unanimously fight against the enemy, until they win. When one of them starts a case against another, he calls him to the court of their king, and they discuss the case in front of him. When parties appear to be dissatisfied with the decision [of the king], he orders the case to be solved by swords; the one whose sword is sharper, wins the case. Armed relatives [from both sides] line themselves up. Then the

242 According to Thorir Jonsson Hraundal, Arabic *jazīrah* has all these meanings (Hraundal 2013: 73).

243 Ibn Rusta, translation by the author from Russian, after Vostochnye istochniki, 47–50.

competitors start to fight, and the one who wins is considered as the winner of the case.

They have sorcerers [*attibah*], some of whom command the king as if they themselves were the rulers of them [the *Rūs*]. It happens that they order what they want to be sacrificed to their Creator: women, men, horses. And when the sorcerers command something, it is impossible not to obey...

...They are brave and manful, and when they attack another people, they don't stop before they [the enemy] are slaughtered. The losers they kill or sell into slavery. They are tall people, slender and of fearless character. But on horseback they are not brave and make all their raids and journeys by ship.

...They all carry swords all the time, as they trust each other only a little, and treachery is common among them. When one of them is found to possess even a little property, his own brother or comrade immediately starts to envy him, and tries to kill and rob him.

When someone noble dies among them, they dig him a grave in the form of a large house, lay him there, and with him they lay in this grave his clothes and the golden bracelets that he used to wear. Then they put there a lot of food, pots with drinks, and coins. Finally, the favourite wife of the dead man is put in the grave while she is still alive. After that, the opening of the grave is covered, and the wife dies.

Somewhat later, other writers generally repeated the same details, in most cases more briefly than Ibn Rusta. Features that were probably considered as most distinctive were the location of the *Rūs* on an island, the lack of dwellings, ways to transfer property among them, the belligerent character of their society, the custom of suttee in their burial rites. Starting from the 10th century, sources talk of different sorts of *Rūs*, also mentioning their main towns, one of them normally Kiev (*Kuyabah*).²⁴⁴ Abū Hāmid al-Garnāti, who wrote in the middle of the 12th century, no longer mentioned the *Rūs* at all, although he described at length the *Saqāliba* (in his meaning, the Slavs), the Bulgars, and different northern people, who traded furs.²⁴⁵

The location on an island can be based, as is sometimes believed, on Ibn Rusta's personal experience, when he visited Ryurik's Gorodishche, a

²⁴⁴ al Istakhri in 951, Ibn Hawqal in 988, the anonymous writer at the end of the 10th century, or Al Bakri in the middle of the 11th century; see Birkeland 1954: 29, 50, 51–52, 65 respectively, or Vostochnye istochniki, 85–86, 94, 55–56, 126 respectively.

²⁴⁵ Text see Wikander 1978: 76–97; Vostochno istochniki, 137–146.

settlement and hill-fort on a kind of island near Lake Ilmen, surrounded by vast wetlands.²⁴⁶ The repetition of this statement could also indicate the maritime character of the (original) *Rūs* culture, with their inhabitation areas on islands and along coasts. The description of marshy areas, however, points rather to the areas east of the Baltic Sea, especially present-day north-western Russia.

The *Rūs* society described by Islamic writers indicates war-bands in campaign mode, or merchants in the Viking Age style, rather than a stable, settled society. All men carried weapons and mistrust among them was high; on the other hand, they fought fearlessly for each other when necessary. Their wives were mentioned, but, except for some details of their adornment, are not really portrayed, as was common for other peoples in the same documents; instead, their female slaves and the attitudes of the *Rūs* to them had attracted much attention.²⁴⁷ The descriptions of the *Rūs* can be considered a mixture of how they were experienced by people whom they visited, for one or another reason, and how they were believed to have lived in their semi-mythical homeland. Since *Rūs* were frequently treated together with the *Saqāliba*, a certain social differentiation emerges, especially in the earlier sources: the people of *Rūs* were the ones who traded and had military power, while the *Saqāliba* were the ones who had wives and children, who dealt with agriculture, paid taxes, and were often sold into slavery.

Islamic sources did not indicate a centralising power among the *Rūs*, as can be deduced from the texts of Russian chronicles. The latter are, however, much later, written down in the context of an already existing state, and were intended to justify the ruling dynasty. Although a king or *chagan* is from time to time mentioned among the *Rūs*, his power seems to have been very limited. When disagreeing with the decision of the king, men could solve their problems by fighting; sorcerers actually had power comparable to or even higher than that of the king. Some descriptions of the “court” of the *Rūs* king, notably by Ibn Fadlān, are more appropriate to fabulous narratives and were, in fact, never experienced by the writers. The society depicted, even if compared with stories of people neighbouring the *Rūs*, seems to have been built up in a way that somehow confused the Islamic writers’ fixed vision of hierarchy.

A characteristic that distinguished the *Rūs* from other people observed by Islamic and Jewish writers is their descent system – that sons were said to get no inheritance from their father other than a sword. Starting from the 12th

²⁴⁶ For a sceptical point of view see e.g. Hraundal 2013: 73–76.

²⁴⁷ Especially Ibn Fadlān, text Ibn Fadlān *et al.*, 3–92.

century, the sources specified that the inheritance went to daughters, while sons only got a sword.²⁴⁸

Rūs live on an island in the sea ... When one of them dies, and leaves behind sons and daughters, all property goes to the daughters, while the son does not get anything but a sword, and he has been told: "Your father obtained property with a sword". [So was it until] they converted to Christianity in 300 [AD 912–13]; after they had accepted Christianity, they put aside these swords and knives. As they did not know any other way to sustain themselves, and the old way was [now] forbidden for them, they ended in disorder because of this, and it proved to be difficult for them to live. Therefore they felt an inclination towards Islam, and became Muslims.²⁴⁹

This passage can be treated as a subjective development by later authors; still, the similarity with descent line systems written down in the Livic-Latgallian legislation in the early 13th century is striking (see topic 2.5.3.2.). The legislation reflected pre-Christian attitudes and probably a matrilineal descent system in some eastern coastal areas of the Baltic Sea, which disappeared after the conversion to Christianity in the first half of the 13th century. It is possible that similar changes in the descent system had taken place even earlier in some areas of the same cultural sphere. In any case, it does not correspond with western sources treating descent systems in Scandinavia.

Hraundal, who supports the theory of a part of the *Rūs* having been connected with Turkic peoples, points to the narrative of Ibn Fadlān, which has mainly been cited to prove the Scandinavian background of the *Rūs*, as containing numerous details discrepant or at least not exclusively characteristic of Scandinavian culture.²⁵⁰ As for the ritual behaviour of the *Rūs*, most characteristics described by Arab writers – such as the custom of suttee, the sacrifice of people and animals by hanging, the worship of wooden idols – were not exclusive to the *Rūs*, but were also described as typical for other people, e.g. the *Saqāliba* and the Bulgars. Frankish swords and weapons in general, burials in ships, cremations, or the use of glass beads, are features that were widespread in a broader area around the northern half of the Baltic Sea than

248 Marvazī in 1120s, Muhammad Afi at the beginning of the 13th century, Amīn Rāzī referring to Ibn Fadlān in the 17th century, see texts *Vostochnye istochniki*, 60, 62; Wikander 1978: 74.

249 Muhammad Afi, translation by the author from Russian, *Vostochnye istochniki*, 62.

250 Hraundal 2013: 92–128.

just Scandinavia, and were more or less characteristic of the common cultural coastal zone that was described in more detail in Chapter 3. The description of how the dead man was kept in a house-like burial, preserved by the cold weather, how his property was divided and used for different purposes, and several other details may have been internationally widespread habits; a shorter version of similar customs can, for instance, be found in Wulfstan's report of *Eastlande* (see Section 4.1.).

Ibn Fadlān's remark that the *Rūs* built big wooden houses in their camping place – but, as it turned out later in the text, at least partly still lived in tents – seems to connect them with Scandinavian culture. Still, he also emphasises the temporary use of these buildings which, in fact, could have been both Scandinavian-style halls and just bigger log houses. The fact that several writers mention the *Rūs* being tall and blonde argues against their Turkic background, and favours their northern origin, though not necessarily Scandinavian. The description of *Rūs* women being adorned with an ornamental box or boxes above their breast may refer to Scandinavian oval brooches, but also the tortoise brooches of, for instance, Livic or Karelian women. A knife in a richly adorned sheath, hanging down from a belt, a brooch or a chain arrangement was in the late 10th–11th-centuries characteristic for Baltic Finnic women and probably one of the most striking elements in their jewellery-set. Similarly, the story of necklaces connected with the number of dirhams possessed by the husband could hint at necklaces made of coin pendants. The latter were very widespread on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, as was the habit of men wearing a number of bronze bracelets – perhaps referred to as “golden” by some Arab writers.²⁵¹ The custom of being covered with green tattoos “from toes to neck”, as Ibn Fadlān described *Rūs* men, is quite unknown in western sources about Scandinavians, although it is not unlikely either.

4.3.5 *The Legend of Three Brothers*

The legend of Varangian brothers becoming the leaders of the Russian state dates back to the 9th century, too, although chronicles mentioning it were written down in the early 12th century, and relied on sources compiled at the end of the 11th century.²⁵² *Nestor's Chronicle* from the early 12th century records that in the year 859 Varangians came over the sea, and took tribute from the *Chud'*, the Slovens, the Merians, and the Krivichians.²⁵³ After having driven the Vikings out soon after that – which, as we can see from other sources, happened

²⁵¹ See the text of Ibn Rusta.

²⁵² Melnikova 2007 and references; 2011: 114.

²⁵³ Nestors krønike, year 859 (6367), 30.

quite often in the unstable political circumstances of the Viking Age – they had to ask them back soon afterwards, according to the chronicler, in order to stop fighting among themselves. Whatever the real situation was, some Swedish supremacy was thereupon established in the territory of *Garðaríki*, the later state of Novgorod.

Elena Melnikova and Vladimir Petrukhin have drawn attention to the parallelism of the terms *Rus'* and *druzhina* (Russian parallel to Scandinavian *hird*, a retinue), as it appears in the two versions of the narrative.²⁵⁴ According to the text in the *Primary Chronicle*:²⁵⁵

Year 860–862 [6368–6370] [The four tribes who had been forced to pay tribute to the Varangians – *Chud'*, *Sloveni*, Merians, and Krivichians] drove the Varangians back beyond the sea, refusing them further tribute, set out to govern themselves. There was no law among them, but tribe rose against tribe. Discord thus ensued among them, and they began to war one against the other. They said to themselves, “Let us seek a prince who may rule over us, and judge us according to the Law”. They accordingly went overseas to the Varangians, to the *Rus'*. These particular Varangians were known as *Rus'*, just as some other sorts are called *Sveas* [Swedes], and others Normans and Angles, and still others Gotlanders, for they were thus named. The *Chud'*, the *Sloveni*, the Krivichians and the *Ves'* then said to the people of *Rus'*, “Our land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us”. They thus selected three brothers, with their kinfolk, who took with them all the *Rus'* and migrated. The oldest, Rurik, located himself in Novgorod; the second, Sineus, in Beloozero; and the third, Truvor, in Izborsk. On account of these Varangians, the district of Novgorod became known as the land of *Rus'*.

The *First Novgorodian Chronicle* sets it out somewhat differently. According to it, the *Rus'* “...took with them a numerous and excellent *druzhina*, and came to Novgorod”. This parallelism points once again to the original socio-political and polyethnic meaning of *Rus'*. In its territorial meaning, the name *Rus'* started to spread only after Prince Oleg and his *druzhina* had established themselves in Kiev in 882.²⁵⁶

Izborsk, Beloozero, and Novgorod were given as the very first residences of three *Rus'* brothers who then arrived to rule over the aforementioned

²⁵⁴ Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991.

²⁵⁵ The Russian Primary Chronicle, 1.

²⁵⁶ Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991: 212.

tribes, probably indicating the earliest centres of the region, or at least how the chronicle viewed them.²⁵⁷ The early Viking Age Izborsk was a hill-fort 30 km west of Pskov, close to the present Estonian border,²⁵⁸ with an intensive 8th–9th-century cultural layer but without finds of noteworthy Scandinavian character.²⁵⁹ The area around Lake Beloye was characterised by numerous remains proving the importance of long-distance trade for the region, which however were spread comparatively evenly among the local settlements, without having a clear concentration in one centre.²⁶⁰ The Novgorod mentioned in the chronicle must actually have been Rurik's Gorodishche, since Novgorod did not exist before the late 10th century, or even Staraya Ladoga, the Scandinavian sagas' *Aldeigjuborg*. Rurik's domain thus corresponded with the earliest *Garðaríki*, as it appeared in the Icelandic legendary sagas (see Figure 4.1.). The following notification in the chronicles, that two years later Rurik of Novgorod had taken over both the aforementioned estates, and become ruler of the whole *Rus'* state, probably indicated the gradual concentration of power in one centre.

Nestor's Chronicle continues with a description of how the *Rus'*, starting from Novgorod/Gorodishche, gradually seized the areas further south, and in 882 made Kiev the capital of their state. Novgorod had to pay tax to the Varangians, which, according to the chronicle, they paid until the second decade of the 11th century.²⁶¹

4.3.6 *Who Were the Chud'?*

The discussion around the earliest meaning of *Rus'* is intermingled with the problem of another Baltic Finnic ethnonym, notably the appearance of the term *Chud'*. In the parts of chronicles depicting the time up to the late 10th century, the *Chud'* seem to occupy a special place, often creating a kind of parallelism with the *Rus'*. Already in the cosmographic introduction to the *Primary Chronicle*, the *Rus'* and *Chud'* were listed together, in apparent distinction to other ethnicities mentioned.²⁶²

In the share of Japheth lies *Rus'*, *Chud'*, and all the gentiles: *Merya*, *Muroma*, *Ves'*, *Mordva*, *Chud'* beyond the portages, *Perm'*, *Pechera*, *Yam'*

²⁵⁷ Nestors krønike, year 862 (6370), 32.

²⁵⁸ This area belonged to Estonia until World War II.

²⁵⁹ Sedov 2007; Lopatin 2012.

²⁶⁰ Makarov 2004.

²⁶¹ Nestors krønike, year 882 (6390), 34–35.

²⁶² Nestors krønike, 23.

[Finns?], *Ugra*, *Litva*, *Zimegola* [Semgallians], *Kors'* [Couronians], *Let'gola* [Latgallians], and *Liv'*. The *Lyakhs* [Poles], the Prussians, and *Chud'* border on the Varangian Sea [the Baltic Sea].

Melnikova and Petrukhin believe that the list of ethnicities, seen through the eyes of an early-12th-century writer, probably indicates a memory of some inner connection between *Rus'* and *Chud'*, the difference between these two and the rest of the “peoples”.²⁶³ According to a general opinion, *Chud'* applies to the inhabitants of present-day Estonia and probably some other Baltic Finns in the neighbourhood.²⁶⁴ They “border on the Varangian Sea” together with Prussians and Poles; however, the Couronians, Livs, and perhaps Finns²⁶⁵ listed together with the other, inland people, actually inhabited coastal areas as well.

The ethnonym *Chud'* is generally believed to be linked with early Slavic *tjud-jo* (alien) and Germanic *piuda* – *peudo* (people).²⁶⁶ *Thiudi* were listed among northern peoples by the 6th-century writer Jordanes. However, in Old Russian texts *Chud'* probably designated, in the narrower meaning of the term, mainly people living in present-day Estonia.²⁶⁷ It is also possible that the ethnonym was used only or predominantly for the part of Estonia that might have belonged to the earliest *Garðaríki* – the people living in the inland districts and in Virumaa in the north-eastern corner of the country. As shown earlier, the inland part of present-day Estonia differed archaeologically in the Viking Age from the western and north-western coastal parts of the country, as well as from the Estonian islands. That the ethnonym *Chud'*, however, had a broader meaning, too, is demonstrated later in the *Primary Chronicle*, where it appears in numerous places.²⁶⁸

The *Chud'* were, according to Russian chronicles, among those who summoned the *Rus'* to rule over them. In the year 859 Varangians came over the sea, and took tribute from *Chud'*, Slovens, Merians, and Krivichians.²⁶⁹ Still, we cannot find the *Chud'* in the list of people “ruled by Ryurik” two years later, nor was their probable “centre” Izborsk named.²⁷⁰ The *Chud'* were accordingly, in the 9th-century context, not among those who paid tribute to *Rus'*-Varangians.

263 Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991.

264 Agneeva 1990: 86–115.

265 For possible meanings of *Yam'*, see Section 7.3.4.

266 Ageeva 1990: 93.

267 Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991.

268 The Finnic-speaking population in the areas east of Lake Peipus were called *Chud'* even in the 18th century (Õpik 1970). By now they have all been assimilated by Russians.

269 The Russian Primary Chronicle, year 859 (6367).

270 The Russian Primary Chronicle, year 859 (6367).

This suggests a certain cooperation with the latter, and is thus linked with the ethno-social original meaning of the word *Rus'*, as well as the ethno-cultural meaning of the word *Chud'*. Both terms acquired the exclusively ethnic content only in the course of time.²⁷¹

It has been pointed out that the status of the *Chud'* in the *Rus'* state seems to have changed abruptly in the last decades of the 10th century, during the rule of Vladimir the Holy (987–1015), or King Valdemar, as he appears in Scandinavian sources.²⁷² In addition to having been present at the foundation of *Rus'*, the *Chud'* participated in the military campaigns arranged by the Russian princes until the 980s. In 980 they helped the then-current Novgorodian Prince Vladimir to subjugate Polotsk.²⁷³ After that, they probably helped Vladimir to gain power over the whole of Kiev-Rus, at least “the best men” of the *Chud'*, together with the Slavs, were the ones who manned the newly-founded towns after Vladimir’s campaign to the south.²⁷⁴

The first attack by the Russian princes on the territory of present-day Estonia known with certainty was undertaken in the 1030s.²⁷⁵ This first raid was followed by several others against the eastern part of Estonia, mainly during the first half of the 11th century. The Estonian historian Herbert Ligi has suggested the conversion of Prince Vladimir in 988 as the main reason, accordingly considering the campaigns as a sort of crusade against the still pagan *Chud'*.²⁷⁶ Additionally, the change in the relationships with the *Chud'* coincides remarkably with the generally diminishing Scandinavian impact in Rus. The beginning of the 11th century is the time when the political system in Old Russia was already firmly established and the now Christian elite of the princedoms was Slavonised.²⁷⁷

271 Melnikova & Petrukhin 1991.

272 Ligi 1968: 38–46; Ageeva 1990: 89.

273 Ligi 1968: 40 and references.

274 The Russian Primary Chronicle, year 988 (6496).

275 The Russian Primary Chronicle, 1030 (6538); for the date, see also Tvaauri 2001: 215–220.

276 Ligi 1968: 38–46. It has also been suggested in Estonian and Finnish publications that *Chud'* before and after 1000 AD might have designated different peoples, and only the *Chud'* after this point can be considered inhabitants of present-day Estonia. Nevertheless, no good argument for supporting the theory has been presented so far (on different theories see Ligi 1980).

277 The change in Scandinavian-Russian relationships during the reign of Vladimir the Holy has also been pointed out by Russian historians. Before the 11th century the connections between these areas were spontaneous, and Scandinavians appeared as one, without differentiating their country of origin. From the last decade of the 10th century until late 1010s Scandinavians do not figure in Russian chronicles, and this is generally also the time

A people called the *Chud'* (*tjuder*, *tsuudit*) exist not only in Russian chronicles, but also in Sami and eastern Finno-Ugric folklore. According to the latest research, Sami habitation in the Viking Age reached much further south in Finland, than is known from later periods.²⁷⁸ *Tjuder* and *karjel* (Karelians) figure in their folklore as plunderers, who forced the Sami to hide themselves in underground huts.²⁷⁹ As for the Eastern Way, it is interesting to note that the tradition of the *Chud'* also exists in Komi folklore, that is, in one of the destination areas of *Austrvegr* – the basins of the Kama and Volga Rivers. In these stories the *Chud'* mainly fail in their attacks, although there are groups and families that claim descent from these *Chud'*. Some researchers have suggested that some *Chud'* immigrated to the Komi area and were assimilated there, an idea that was reflected in folk tradition.²⁸⁰ It is, however, uncertain whether these stories refer to the Viking Age or some much later period, and who exactly was being labelled with the ethnonym *Chud'*.

4.4 Languages and Personal Names

In the saga literature, language is only seldom pointed out as a problem when communicating with people outside Scandinavia. Neither does the *Primary Chronicle* point to any language difficulties when asking *Rus'* to rule over different peoples in present-day north-western Russia, and perhaps part of Estonia. Vikings talking to kings or other potentates in other countries probably often used interpreters, even if they were not mentioned in the stories. However, in saga narratives that took place east of the Baltic Sea Scandinavians often talked to ordinary people whom they had just met in these countries. Frequent comments that these people actually originated from one or another Scandinavian country can be seen as attempts to explain to listeners how such communication was linguistically possible. Whether these explanations originally existed in these narratives, or were added later and thus reflected the medieval situation, is difficult to determine.

when their influence in archaeological evidence ceases. The next and last intense period of Scandinavian relationships appeared during the reign of Yaroslav the Wise (1016–1018, 1019–1054), but then the character of relations had already changed: from now on could they be described as political connections between consolidated states (Melnikova 2007).

278 Ahola & Frog 2014.

279 Laestadius 2011/1845: 325–332; Wallerström 1995: 234.

280 Wallerström 1995: 234–235 and references.

Language difficulties seem to more or less not exist in the legendary sagas, where all people in *Austrvegr* seem to understand each other's tongue and nearly all have names that sound Scandinavian. In some few cases the problem is nevertheless raised, indicating that it was not completely unknown for the saga-tellers. A good example is the story of Asmundr and Odd in another expedition to *Bjarmaland* where they understood absolutely nothing of the local language, until they found a man who spoke Norwegian.²⁸¹ Yngvar the Traveller was said to have learned many languages in *Garðaríki*, but he still sometimes had to use interpreters during his journey to the east.²⁸² The early-12th-century Sambian merchant Vidgaut was also said to have spoken many languages.²⁸³

The archaeologically evident unity of Viking Age warrior culture, which embraced all coastal areas around the northern half of the Baltic Sea, could hardly have developed without some kind of *lingua franca*. The generally Scandinavian artefact culture that expressed the cultural unity suggests that it might have been some eastern Scandinavian dialect, or perhaps a sort of pidgin Scandinavian supplemented with Baltic Finnic.²⁸⁴ Bilingualism in certain social spheres, notably in the military sphere, was probably commonplace in the areas around the Gulf of Finland. However, this situation might have started to change in the 11th century, when the Slavonisation of present-day north-west Russia accelerated. This corresponds with a change in the contacts between Scandinavia and Russia, which became more governmental and dynastic, and the gradually diminishing role that Baltic Finns played in this communication. As was demonstrated earlier in this text, it also led to new attitudes towards the Eastern Baltic peoples, reflected in both Scandinavian and Russian written sources.

In the legendary sagas, most personal names in the countries that belonged to *Austrvegr* were Scandinavian. Entirely Scandinavian names occur also in connection with *Garðaríki*, Finland, and Estonia in other sagas, even when these persons, according to the context, were most likely locals. The Viking Gunnar for example, went ashore in *Eysýsla* to talk to a man whom he saw there, evidently with the expectation that they would understand each other. As in several other cases, the saga-teller has the man, whose name is Tofi, luckily originate from Denmark. Tofi then helped Gunnar to beat two other Vikings, with the names Hallgrim and Kolskeggr, who had hidden their

281 Örvar Odds Saga, 30.

282 Saga of Yngvar the Traveller, 5ff.

283 Knytlinga Saga, 88.

284 See also Moilanen 2015: 294.

treasure in some place on the island – which makes their local descent most likely.²⁸⁵

Several Estonian personal names were given in the story of how the later Norwegian king Ólaf Tryggvason suffered slavery in Estonia in his early childhood. Persons who were clearly called Estonians were called Klerkón, Klerk Réás the latter's wife Rékón and their son Rékóni. The names are neither completely Scandinavian nor Finnic, and therefore some Estonian scholars have argued that the names might originally have been Baltic.²⁸⁶ They suggested, therefore, that the toponym *Estland* in this narrative was suddenly used incorrectly, or that the name indicated a broader territory than just present-day Estonia. These arguments, however, appear weak when looked at in a broader context. Other Estonian authors have also disagreed with the assumed ethnic Baltic context of Ólaf's story, and suggested instead that the names were just constructed to emphasise the reliability of the story.²⁸⁷

It is worth mentioning that a similar construction of personal names seems to characterise several legendary sagas, where kings of *Garðaríki*, for example, had names such as Kvillánus or Framar, but could also possess such proper Scandinavian names as Halfdan, Hreggvidr, or Yngvar. If not authentically Scandinavian, names for kings were often constructed according to the places they were supposed to rule over – for instance, Paltés ruled over *Palteskjuborg* (Polotsk) and Kænmar over *Kænugörðum* (Kiev).²⁸⁸ Finland's kings were Snæ, Snækollr, or Frost in different sagas. Saxo wrote in Latin, but his choice of names in the eastern areas of the Baltic Sea include such "Livonian" names as Ger, Bikke, Handwan, Dia, and Daxon, Couronians were called Loker, Dorn, and Hame, *Ruthenian* or simply the eastern kings Olmar, Tranno, and Dag, the *Ruthenian* chieftains Wisin and Rothe. Starkadr, who was said by Saxo to have originated from Estonia, had a father called Storwerk, and the "Finnish" names quoted were, for instance, Signe, Egther, Matul, Thengil, Rostioph, and Kuse.

Looking from the Russian side, the Scandinavian background of the *Rus'* is obvious in early personal names as they appear in treaties between Byzantium and *Rus'*, as well as in several parallel toponyms in present-day Russia. Among personal names mentioned in 911, two are believed to be of Finnic origin (Aktevu and Lidul), while another 14 names mentioned are Scandinavian. From 76 names mentioned in the treaty of 944, three are considered Finnish (Iskusevi,

285 The Story of Burnt Njal, 30.

286 Palmaru 1980; Tarvel 1994.

287 Jonuks 2004; Zilmer 2005: 294.

288 E.g. Örvar Odds Saga, especially 30; see also Drevneskandinavskiye istochniki, 263–264.

Kanitsar, Pubskar), two simply general markers of ethnicity (Libi, Jatvjag), and several of uncertain derivation (Jevlisk, Voik, Aminod, Jeton, Karshev, Istr, Mutur, Tilena). Seven names were probably Slavic, and all others Scandinavian.²⁸⁹ Melnikova has suggested that a rapid Slavonisation in present-day Russia started by the end of the 10th century, and Old Norse disappeared from everyday use by the end of the 11th century.²⁹⁰

How far these persons' ethnic background can be decided from their names, however, is dubious. Berit Sandnes has analysed how Scandinavian personal names spread in Viking colonies in Normandy and the British Isles, and pointed to the very quick acceptance of Old Norse names by the locals, as well as to the persistence of such names even after the newcomers had been assimilated. Soon after colonisation, persons could have two parallel names, which were used differently in different spheres, and often also sounded completely differently – best illustrated by a remark in a 11th-century Latin document about a certain “Richard who is called Thorstein Haldup”.²⁹¹ Something similar probably also characterised the situation both in *Austrvegr* and in *Garðaríki*, or early *Rus'*.

In the shared cultural milieu around the coastal areas of the northern Baltic Sea, where Middle Sweden dominated culturally and Old Norse or a kind of pidgin Scandinavian was presumably used as a *lingua franca*, Scandinavian personal names could easily be used, either in parallel with the local ones, or not. The particularly strong Scandinavian impact in spheres connected with military activity suggests bilingualism especially among men in the service of some chieftain.²⁹² These warriors were difficult to distinguish from “real” *Svea* warriors by their appearance, and might also have used names that resembled those of the latter.

The east Scandinavian pidgin that probably characterised Viking Age communication might have disappeared, at least in its widespread form, starting from the 11th century. Eastern Baltic personal names as they appear in the 13th-century sources that were originally written down in Latin or Lower German sound different from eastern names in saga literature, although some similarity with Old Norse names can sometimes be traced, especially in coastal areas. Instead, by the 13th century Russian names had obviously started to influence personal names in the Eastern Baltic. For example, Livic names given in the *Chronicle of Henry the Livonian* were Ymaut, Asso, Anno, Caupo, and

289 Melnikova 2004.

290 Melnikova 2011: 257–268.

291 Sandnes 2004.

292 See models suggested by Mallory 1992.

Kyrian, but also more Finnic sounding such as Wane, Vesike, or Uldewene. Latgallian kings and chieftains were, for instance, according to the same source, Wiscewalde, Vesceka, Waridote, Daugeruthe, or Dabrel. Inland Estonians bore such names as Lembito, Unnepewe, Wottele, and Maniwalde, and a chief in the north-eastern coast of Estonia was called Thabelinus. Eight main chieftains of Saaremaa, who signed a contract in the middle of the 13th century, were called Ylle, Culle, Enu, Muntelene, Tappete, Valde, Melete, and Cake.

4.5 Conclusions

This survey of written sources about the Viking Age situation around the northern half of the Baltic Sea and along its eastern coast revealed considerable diversity in situations and attitudes throughout the centuries. In connection with the Eastern Baltic it was mainly the pre-Viking era and the earliest part of the Viking Age that appeared as most intriguing – even though the sources were often just draped with mythical adventure-stories. It was entirely coastal areas or areas along major water routes where the mythical heroes dwelt, and these areas were mainly leading further east, along the large rivers in present-day Russia to the eastern Islamic world. As for the Eastern Baltic, the preference for the *Austrvegr*-route was reflected in sagas by the predominance of references to places and peoples in the northern half of this region. It was a common cultural sphere including mainly eastern Scandinavian and Baltic Finnic elements that defined the earliest networks, and was much less Slavic than it appeared in the following period. That the coastal areas of present-day Finland, Estonia, and Latvia were considered as belonging under Swedish dominion throughout the centuries indicates the shared cultural milieu quite clearly.

Especially German and Danish ambitions along the southern coast of the Baltic, and then further up towards the north, brought ethnic Baltic peoples into the picture. The meaning of *Samland*, *Kúrland*, and *Estland* in different combinations seems, however, to indicate a certain overlapping of these names. As for communication, both Couronia and Sambia were probably more relevant for trade routes towards south or south-east than to the east, and led, primarily, to Byzantium.

Scandinavian legendary sagas, as well as archaeological material, indicate the presence of Scandinavian-influenced culture in the countries around the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland much earlier than Russian sources lead us to believe. This was the region that was originally called *Garðaríki*, a part of *Austrvegr*, and appeared as the earliest *Rus'* dominion described in the *Primary*

Chronicle. It seems likely that another power base developed separately in the area around Kiev up to the late 9th century – especially when we remember that in some legendary sagas *Garðaríki* and Russia were clearly different places. The Slavonisation of *Garðaríki* probably accelerated around the same time, when, because of cultural changes, it is actually more accurate to talk about Kiev taking over *Garðaríki*, and not the other way round. The *Primary Chronicle* can be seen as a sign of these processes: although it emphasised the *Rus'* origin of the ruling dynasty, it properly started with the event of two *Rus'* men, who were not even members of the dynasty, taking over Kiev around 864. All the previous history of independent *Garðaríki* was represented only with brief mythical statements.

We can also conclude that the ethnic origin of the *Rus'*, according to the Viking Age sources, is directly connected neither with Scandinavians, nor with Slavs or any other ethnic group. On the contrary, descriptions surviving until our own times seem to favour the multi-ethnic background of the *Rus'*, and were probably dependent on which kind of *Rus'* were met or heard about in particular cases. Those *Rus'* who were warriors and merchants from the North, as they appear in several Islamic and Kiev-Rus sources, can be assumed to have been members of the warrior society affiliated with the shared cultural milieu in coastal areas around the pre-Viking and early Viking Age northern Baltic Rim. The cultural identification of the *Rus'* demonstrated, nevertheless, a strong Scandinavian impact – the use of Scandinavian names can serve here as one of the best tokens for it.

The name *Rus'* in its original meaning can thus be considered parallel, or at least similar, to the term Vikings, and perhaps also to the name *Kuri/Chori*. In its original form Scandinavian and Baltic Finnic elements probably prevailed in this cultural milieu, but Slavic elements in particular as well as Baltic, Turkic, and other features left their strong imprint in the course of time, and in the end of the whole process the *Rus'* identity was equated with the Slavic one.

Networks Take Shape: Communication Through the Eastern Baltic 600–850

Depictions of ships on some Gotlandic picture-stones suggest that the sail was brought into use on Baltic Sea vessels in the 7th century. It was a fundamental technological innovation, facilitating direct journeys over the open sea that previously might have been quite exceptional, relying on man-power and oars. The invention of sails thus transformed relationships between different countries and led to the appearance of new cultural patterns, which are also reflected in archaeological evidence.

All over Europe, the period from the 5th till the 7th centuries witnessed momentous social transformations. As is generally now believed, these processes were accelerated, or, according to the opinion of some scholars, even triggered, by the climatically extraordinary years 536–537 and 540–542.¹ Some researchers combine the impact of these years with the Plague of Justinian, which struck most of Europe during the years 541–561.² To what extent the wave of pestilences in the 5th–7th centuries, with its peak in the 540s, affected Northern Europe, is however unknown, and estimates vary from the loss of 50% of the population (in combination with famine) to populations having remained nearly untouched.³ We should also keep in mind that the whole period from the 5th to the mid-9th centuries was characterised by cooling weather, ending with extraordinarily cold winters at the beginning of the 9th century.⁴

For most areas surrounding the northern part of the Baltic Sea, this period witnessed the appearance of burials richly furnished with weapons. Usually, these are interpreted as reflecting an increase in the role of warriors in society, a rapid increase of hierarchisation, and in some areas as first indications of the appearance of states. The probable triggering effect of the years 536–537 can easily be seen behind these transformations. Two summers with the so-called “Veil of Dust” and no sunshine, as written sources from southern countries described it, must have completely spoiled the harvest, causing serious famine and social disturbance, and thus rapidly increased the significance of warriors.

1 Gunn 2000; Gräslund & Price 2012.

2 Solberg 2000: 201–202; Charpentier Ljungqvist 2009.

3 Jones 2000; Solberg 2000: 201–202; Gräslund & Price 2012.

4 Gunn 2000, especially Fig. 1.1.

5.1 Cultural Situation around the Northern Part of the Baltic Sea

On the eastern shores of the Baltic, changes from that period have almost everywhere been explained as a sudden increase of Scandinavian cultural influence – nevertheless without much discussion about the possible causes.⁵ The extent of the changes that actually took place in the societies of different areas on the eastern shores of the Baltic was, however, directly connected to earlier developments in their respective societies. The singularity of the archaeological material from Estonia, and from some parts of Finland, is still striking. The general rule seems to be that the widespread cultural influence of eastern Scandinavia on the eastern regions becomes less intensive and more topographically isolated towards the south; on the south-eastern coast of the Baltic, where Scandinavian colonies seem to have existed at some nodal points on the international routes, the cultural impact hardly reached further than the colonies themselves.

5.1.1 *Swedish Warriors in Finland and Estonia?*

Clear Scandinavian features in the archaeological material of the Finnish coast were actually evident in much earlier periods. The Bronze Age archaeological material in the western and south-western Finnish coasts appeared, according to Unto Salo, as an obvious part of the central Swedish bronze culture, and this also meant a population originating from Scandinavia, or more precisely, current Swedish territory.⁶ During the Roman Iron Age richly furnished individual warrior-burials emerged in the same Finnish regions that were usually associated with populations from either Scandinavia or Continental Europe.⁷ As well as individual burials, collective burial sites similar to those in Estonia also occurred in Finland, especially after the 3rd century AD when cremation and the custom of destroying grave goods became dominant.⁸ Even the inhumation graves that appeared in one particular small area – Eura in the northern part of the south-western Finnish coast – starting from the 5th century have sometimes been connected with possible immigration from the central Swedish areas. These immigrants, indicated by international weapon types, were believed to have been rapidly assimilated.⁹ Nevertheless, these inhumation burials are

5 Pihlman 1990: 17–19; Schauman-Lönnqvist 1996; Høilund-Nielsen 2000; Žulkus 2000; Bitner-Wroblewska 2001: 121–127; Raninen 2005.

6 Salo 1970: 140–152.

7 Salo 1984: 220–223; 1995; Pihlman 1985.

8 Salo 1984: 208.

9 See Raninen 2005 and references.

normally considered proper Finns in modern research. “Foreign” items always appeared together with local style artefacts, and female attributes were as a rule local.

From the 5th or 6th century onwards, stone cemeteries without formal structure and with unidentifiable cremation burials, similar to the ones in Finland, are also known in Estonia.¹⁰ During the following centuries, this type emerged as the dominant grave type in both of these countries. The probable effect of the years 536–537 in west Estonia can be seen in the appearance of weapons in some graves, as well as in several individual cremation burials. Mati Mandel has reported a number of burial complexes in grave pits, especially from the aforementioned centuries, with an increased number of weapon complexes.¹¹ The latter are certainly likely to be distinguished because of the size and recognisability of weapons, but can also point to a period of warrior superiority in the local society. A similar situation has been noted in Finland, where these phenomena have been the basis for suggesting that a so-called double ideology dominated in society: stressing individuality and warrior attributes on the one hand, which, however, only included a section of the male inhabitants; and emphasising collectivity on the other hand, which had already started during the previous period.¹²

Seemingly individual burials also took place in the sand barrows of south-east Estonia from the 5th–6th centuries; nevertheless, study in recent years has demonstrated that the remains of several individuals can sometimes be found in one funeral vessel.¹³ Artefacts other than urns very seldom occur in these sites. Cremated bones found in the stone circle graves that appeared on Saaremaa from the 7th–8th centuries onward have so far proved to have belonged to one person only, and thus indicate individual burial customs similar to Gotlandic stone graves of the same time.¹⁴

Stone circle graves on Saaremaa seldom contained surviving grave goods before the end of the 10th century. 7th-mid-10th-century burials were rare everywhere in Estonia (except the few graves with abundant weapons, mentioned above). This is especially surprising when compared to the contemporary abundance of finds from neighbouring areas (Figures 5.1. and 5.2.). Only a fraction of osteological material has been dated by scientific methods so far,

10 Selirand 1974; Mägi 2002: 125–132; Mandel 2003.

11 Mandel 2003.

12 Purhonen 1996: 126–128; Wickholm & Raninen 2006.

13 Aun 1992: 78–113; Aun *et al.* 2008.

14 Mägi *et al.* 1997; Mägi 2002: 125–132.



FIGURE 5.2 *Artefacts from 9th-century female inhumation burial No 142 at Palanga cemetery, Couronia (Griciuvienė 2009: 159).*

COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF LITHUANIA.

making it even more questionable whether we are dealing here with the absence of burials, or the absence of grave goods.

Ideology can hamper a social elite from demonstrating its position through grave forms or goods, as is notably demonstrated, for instance, by medieval Christian burials. First of all cremations can easily remain unnoticed by archaeologists when they do not contain artefacts, and especially when they were not deposited in distinguishable monuments but, for instance, spread by wind or water. It is a good opportunity here to recall the description of 9th-century *Eastlande* that was added to the text of Wulfstan's voyage "...And that is a custom among the Ests that people of every nationality must be cremated there, and if a single bone is found unburnt there, they must atone for it greatly" (see topic 4.1. for more detail). This statement characterises coastal areas of present-day Estonia definitely better than Prussia in the same period: cremation was presumably dominant in 9th-century coastal Estonia, while there existed both cremations and inhumations in Prussia, including those of foreign people in some areas.

Unfortunately, the quantity of archaeologically known burial places from the mid-7th till the mid-10th centuries in coastal Estonia is surprisingly small, even though some hill-forts and settlements next to them demonstrate quite

intensive activity (e.g. Iru and Pada II in northern and north-western Estonia, Asva and Pöide on Saaremaa). Most explanations Estonian archaeologists have offered for this phenomenon so far are driven by a very conservative way of explaining archaeological evidence. These ideas were primarily influenced by the assumption that no graves equates to no population, while numerous graves, especially when supplied with abundant artefacts, could be explained by an increased and wealthy population. So Lang, for instance, has argued, based on the disappearance of graves in Northern Estonia, for a settlement move from arable lands to the hill-fort and settlement of Iru in the 6th century, even though only a few contemporary graves are known in the vicinity of the hill-fort either (for more detail, see topic 3.4.2.).¹⁵

Tvauri, talking of Estonia in more general terms, has even suggested an ultra-dramatic consequence of the 536–537 AD climatic conditions for the present-day Estonia, which led to a demographic catastrophe. Only towards the end of the 10th century (that is, when artefacts re-appeared in graves) might the population, according to him, have reached the same level as before 536.¹⁶ He seems not to feel perturbed by the situation in countries neighbouring Estonia, where the 7th century can already be considered the time of increasing archaeological evidence again.¹⁷ No decrease of archaeological evidence has been reported in the other Baltic countries either. In Estonia, there is still a number of graves known from the 6th and the first half of the 7th centuries, so the population, according to the lines of Tvauri's theory, might have disappeared only in the mid-7th century. Archaeological evidence in Estonia, as well as in most parts of Finland and in the Livic and northern Couronian area in Latvia, remained scarce until the last part of the 10th century.¹⁸

It is hard to believe in the selective impact of climatic conditions, especially when it seems to follow the ethnic lines. The shortage of burial places during quite a long period in most of the areas that were later inhabited by Baltic-Finnic-speaking peoples is presumably connected with an ideology that was different from that of most neighbouring areas.

5.1.2 *Eastern Scandinavians' Cultural Impact to the Northern Baltic Shores*

The 5th-early-7th centuries' abundant and sometime individual burials of warriors in coastal Estonia, and sometimes the burial custom itself, demonstrated

¹⁵ Lang 1996: 34–104, 476–477; 2004.

¹⁶ Tvauri 2012: 305–312.

¹⁷ Näsman 2000: 60–62; Solberg 2000: 203; Skre 2007a.

¹⁸ Mägi 2005b.

a sort of similarity with contemporary burials in eastern Sweden and Finnish coastal areas. It can be assumed that those buried in this way belonged to a military elite, which had recently increased its influence in society. Whether or not these persons were immigrants from Scandinavia is impossible to answer, at least in cases when the Scandinavian artefacts were found from stone graves without formal structure, where individual cremations cannot even be separated from each other. The Scandinavian items were however recovered together with very local attributes, and artefacts originating from eastern areas were frequently recorded in the same find assemblages as well. Were those buried at these sites local chieftains practising contacts with both east and west – the pioneers of *Austrvegr*?

The most extraordinary grave in northern Estonia was excavated in the 1970s at Proosa, near present-day Tallinn and only 2.6 km from the hill-fort of Iru.¹⁹ It was a stone grave without formal structure, where cremations of different individuals were totally intermingled. How many individuals were buried at the site is unknown, since no biological analyses have been carried out. Among other, remarkably abundant, Migration Period find material, a number of luxury items, probably imported from Scandinavia, were found there: 16 clasp-buttons with gold and silver decoration, different mounts, a pommel of a ring-headed sword, and a buckle-like artefact with rich relief decoration, altogether 23 items (Figure 5.3.).²⁰ In addition, numerous boat rivets were unearthed. Although Jüri Selirand and Kaupo Deemant have suggested that a Scandinavian chieftain who was visiting the market-place of Iru died there and was buried in a local (family?) grave, this ethnic definition can be debated because the majority of finds, as well as the burial custom, were totally local. In addition to the above-mentioned artefacts, numerous weapons were uncovered in the same grave, and several belt mounts originating from the Perm area in the basin of the Kama River in present-day Russia indicate that the elite group buried at Proosa had connections in both east and west.

Perm belt decorations were also recorded in an abundantly equipped 7th-century male inhumation burial at Eura Pappilanmäki in Finland,²¹ where they formed a complex together with some other artefacts, including a luxurious sword of the same type as was later found at Proosa, too. Christian Carpelan has suggested that Permian belts might have functioned as signs of membership in a trading network that extended from the Kama region to Finland,

19 Deemant 1977, 1978.

20 Selirand & Deemant 1985.

21 Salmo 1941.



FIGURE 5.3

Some Scandinavian artefacts found in Proosa grave near Tallinn, north Estonia. 1 – TLM 14847: 86, 2 – TLM 15740: 42, 3 – TLM 15109: 15, 21, 27, 13943: 90, 4 – TLM 13943: 274, 5 – TLM 15109: 136, 6 – TLM 14335: 18, 7 – TLM 13213: 33; 14335: 33; 14847: 8, 77. PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.

while the warriors buried with them were also members of the *hird* of some Eastern Swedish prince.²²

Eastern belt mounts have been recorded in several other finds in Finland, and in some selected places in Estonia. They date mainly to the 7th or early 8th centuries and suggest intensified communication with the Perm areas in the Volga River Basin during the pre-Viking period.²³ Several Finnish archaeologists have suggested that the eastern finds in Finland demonstrated the activity and early trade contacts from the eastern Finno-Ugrians, thus pointing to the role Baltic Finns played in the establishment of east-west trade routes.²⁴ The extraordinarily abundantly equipped burial in Eura Pappilanmäki with its Germanic sword, eastern belt decoration, and local, that is, Finnish-Estonian decorative pin, functions as a perfect example of the era when the eastern-western connections were binding together.

²² Carpelan 2006.

²³ Hirviluoto 1978.

²⁴ Meinander 1973; Carpelan 2006.

The stone grave at Proosa has been dated to the 5th–6th centuries by Lang,²⁵ but several artefacts indicate that the site could have been in use until the mid-7th century. As was characteristic of so many burial grounds in coastal Estonia, no use of the site has been recorded during the late 7th up to the late 10th centuries, while the 11th–13th centuries were again represented by numerous grave goods.

In Karelia, which now belongs to Russia, two Migration Period finds of Scandinavian origin stand out, both dated to the 6th century. A Scandinavian equal-armed brooch with animal-style ornament, together with different mounts and belt buckles, was uncovered on Tytärsaari island in the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland,²⁶ and two clasp buttons indicated the western connections in a cremation burial uncovered at Sortavala Nukuttalahti at the north-eastern shore of Lake Ladoga.²⁷ These burials (especially the Tytärsaari find) can be interpreted as signs of intensifying interaction between the eastern and western areas, marking one of the most intensively used international routes known from some centuries later.²⁸ Ceramics similar to that on the north Estonian coast at Tytärsaari, as well as the grave type itself, probably points to the local background of the site. In addition, the same route can be indicated by a Salin I style artefact, perhaps a buckle, at Ojaveski grave in North Estonia. Like other such finds, this was uncovered in an otherwise very local stone-built grave.

Another place in Estonia, where a number of 5th–6th-century Scandinavian items have been recorded, is the probable funeral house at Paju in Kihelkonna, the eastern coast of Saaremaa.²⁹ Single artefacts decorated in the Salin I style, mainly clasp buttons, have also been detected in several other places in coastal Estonia, forming a collection of about 30 items (Figure 5.4.). A bracelet from Lügänuuse Maidla on the north-eastern coast of the country stands out among other finds – an ornament of local type elaborately decorated in Salin I style (Figure 5.5.).³⁰

Aarni Erä-Esko has reported that 54 artefacts decorated in the Salin I style were known in Finland in 1965, most of them clasp buttons or brooches; the number is probably greater now, especially because of the introduction of the metal detector (Figure 5.6.).³¹ The number of different 6th–8th-century imported artefacts of both eastern and western origin is generally much bigger

25 Lang 1996: 196–197.

26 Uino 2003: 303–305.

27 Uino 2003: 298–302.

28 Kivikoski 1940.

29 Tamla & Jaanits 1977; Mägi 2005a.

30 Jets 2013: 27–28.

31 Erä-Esko 1965: 8.

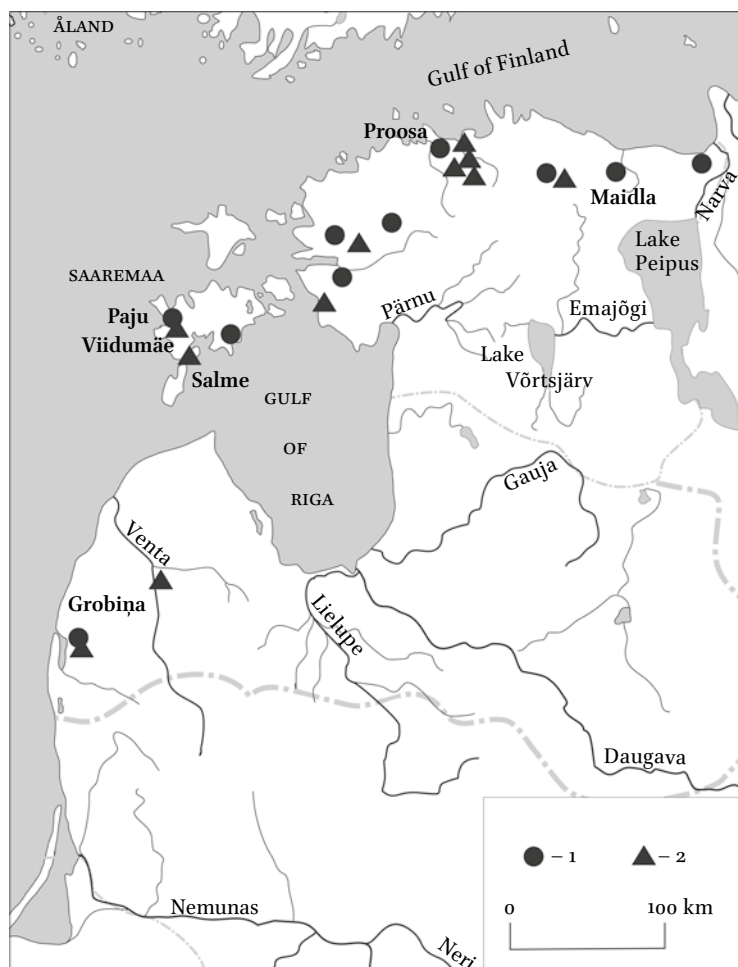


FIGURE 5.4 *Distribution of 5th–9th-century artefacts decorated in early Germanic animal styles in the Eastern Baltic. 1 – Salin I style, 2 – from Salin II to Borre style. Based on: Jets 2013, 27–40.*

in Finland than in Estonia. The phenomenon can, however, be due to the difference between burial customs in these two countries, and especially to the widespread individual weapon burials in coastal Finland, where most of these artefacts have been found.

The 5th–6th-centuries Germanic animal styles have also influenced the southern half of the Eastern Baltic, although on a much smaller scale. Lithuanian archaeologists believe that the Salin I style was imitated by local artists in forming some crossbow-brooches. At least four brooches ending with an animal head in the Salin I style have been recorded in Couronia and former Prussia



FIGURE 5.5 *Some 5th–9th-century artefacts from Estonia, decorated in Germanic animal styles. 1 – Maidla (Käsmu Museum), 2 – Linnakse (TLU AI 6961: 115), 3, 7 – Olustvere (TLU AI 5005: 1, 2), 4 – Kasari (in private possession), 5 – Paatsa (AM A 136: 1), 6 – Virumaa (Käsmu Museum). From: Jets 2013, Figs. 9, 11, 21, 4, 20, 23. PHOTOGRAPHS BY I. JETS.*

(Figure 5.7).³² Audronė Bliujienė has pointed out seven other brooches with animal heads, but their decoration possesses, according to Indrek Jets, an Estonian expert of animal style ornaments, only a vague resemblance to Scandinavian styles. A particular brooch from Grobiņa forms an exception though.³³

³² Bliujienė 2007.

³³ Jets 2013: 28.

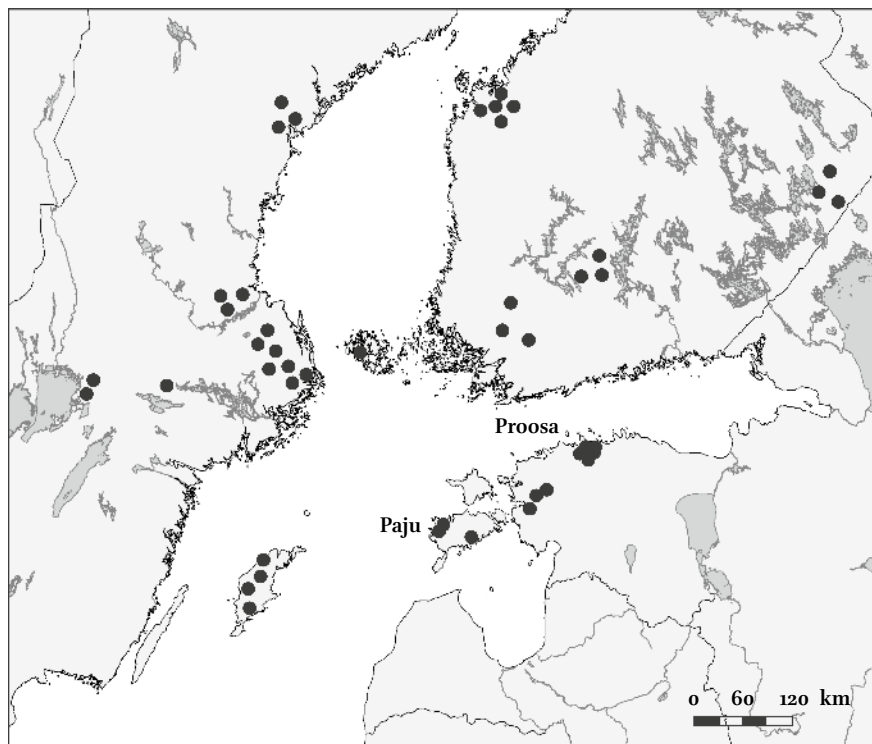


FIGURE 5.6 *Distribution of clasp buttons decorated in Salin 1 style. Based on: Lamm 1972; Kuiv 1991. The actual number of finds is probably bigger by now.*



FIGURE 5.7
*Crossbow-brooch from Çeistauti, Couronia (LVNM A 9905: 2).
PHOTOGRAPH BY M. MÄGI.*

In spite of the appearance of Scandinavian artefacts and animal styles described above, the archaeological evidence in 5th–7th-century Finland and Estonia demonstrates predominantly relations with the southern Eastern Baltic areas, mixed with more local features in artefactual culture. This cultural unity of the eastern coast of the sea was particularly obvious in ornaments, but a great deal of weapons belonged to some local type as well, or represented international, West European types.³⁴ Bronze items of presumably Scandinavian origin that in this period were used in Finland and Estonia may therefore rather be considered as imports, and can be compared with other imported items, for instance those from the great Volga water route in the east. It is hardly accidental that the finds of imported items from both east and west concentrated around relevant international routes.

It is obvious that Finnish 5th–7th-century find material is more abundant and variable than the Estonian, and that is true both for the imported items and the rest of the archaeological evidence. To a great extent this can presumably be attributed to the differences in burial rites, but differences in inter-regional communication cannot be underestimated either. Weapon burials in coastal Finland proceeded from cultural traits in Middle Sweden; the archaeological material in south-western and western Finnish coastal regions had indicated remarkably intensive overseas communication with Middle Sweden even in former periods. Logistical aspects probably play a role in this: it is comparatively easy to row a boat from Middle Sweden to the Finnish coast, especially when choosing the route through the archipelago of Åland. Personal and family relationships can be assumed to have been essential in inter-regional communication in the northern part of the Baltic Sea; their role in communication between Middle Sweden and the Estonian coast, let alone areas even further away, may have been considerably less important. Whether any or many of the population in certain parts of coastal Finland were ethnic Scandinavians is a matter for discussion, but nearly all researchers dealing with the subject assume at least a certain degree of immigration from the western coast of the Gulf of Bothnia.

The archaeological evidence on Åland is conspicuously Scandinavian. In the middle Iron Age, a great number of the dead were buried cremated in individual graves, covered with stone heaps. The grave type did not resemble collective stone graves without formal structures, which were widespread in most parts of Finland; graves on Åland were similar to burials in Middle Sweden, and the same applied to the majority of finds uncovered in these graves. Many of them were international weapon types and some other items that were actually widespread in the coastal areas of Finland and Estonia as well.

34 Pihlman 1990: 259–265.

A considerable part of the artefacts in these graves belonged to types that characterised Finland or Estonia.³⁵ It is worth noting that the Åland graves described above also possessed similarities with the graves under stone mounds that were widespread especially in western Saaremaa in the Viking Age, but perhaps earlier as well.³⁶ The number of ornaments particularly belonging to types widespread in the northern part of the Eastern Baltic seems to be considerable on Åland, at least in the exhibition in Åland Museum.

The difference between Estonian and Finnish archaeological evidence increased abruptly in the 8th–9th centuries, perhaps starting from the mid-7th century. The Merovingian period (600–800 AD) is considered the era of most abundant weapon burials in Finland,³⁷ and the majority of these particular burials continued to resemble graves in Middle Sweden. A number of artefacts were decorated in the Salin II style that characterised the first part of the Merovingian period. Although Finnish jewellery still demonstrated a close resemblance to ornaments in the Eastern Baltic, the percentage of local types increased, and several of them indicated impact from Middle Sweden or Gotland. Weapons in Merovingian period Finland consisted of both local types and a great number of international types that were also widespread in Middle Sweden, where the *Svearíki* was gradually taking shape. Most scholars have considered the warrior culture in the Merovingian period or early Viking Age Finland as defined through vassalage, where the *Svearíki* played the superior role.³⁸

The archaeological evidence in 8th–9th-century Estonia was strikingly different (Figures 5.8. and 5.9.). Individual weapon burials that characterised the 5th–7th centuries had disappeared; as a matter of fact, graves nearly disappeared altogether, and were now represented only by single examples, and even these were frequently questionable. Many of the sand barrows that occurred in south-eastern Estonia in that period but that hardly contained any grave goods probably belonged to the 8th–9th centuries; however, this did not change the bizarre phenomenon of an almost total lack of burial grounds in coastal Estonia. The “demographic catastrophe” suggested by Tvauri apparently predominantly characterised the centuries immediately before and immediately after the beginning of the Viking Age, at least on a much bigger scale than the 6th or 7th centuries. Several hill-forts and settlements that had been in intensive use during the 8th and 9th centuries, e.g. Iru in the vicinity of Tallinn or Pöide and Asva on the island of Saaremaa, at the same time suggest intensive

35 Kivikoski 1963: especially 127–133; Gustavsson *et al.* 2014.

36 Mägi 2002: 125–128.

37 Raninen 2005.

38 Schauman-Lönnqvist 1996: 134; Raninen 2005.



FIGURE 5.8 Coastal Estonian artefacts from a deposit find, perhaps a sacrificial place at Kunilepa, dated around 800 AD (TLU AI 2483: 1, 30, 13, 9, 8, 18, 24).
PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.



FIGURE 5.9 Coastal Estonian weapons, together with some ornaments, from a probable sacrificial place at Kunilepa, dated around 800 AD (TLU AI 2484).
PHOTOGRAPH BY M. KIUDSOO.

human activity in the coastal regions, especially in places that may have played a considerable role in inter-regional trade networks.

The strangely small number of graves, or graves with surviving archaeological evidence, in the area of present-day Estonia, but also in some other regions presumably inhabited by people speaking Baltic Finnic languages, is particularly conspicuous when compared with neighbouring areas. The ethnic Balts were in this period characterised by remarkably abundant graves with a considerable amount of grave goods. Weapon burials recorded in coastal Finland were mentioned earlier. The Salin II ornamental style, succeeding style I, was still widespread on numerous Finnish artefacts, while the same style in Estonia has so far been represented only by one find in a grave near Tallinn. Single 8th–9th-century artefacts decorated with other Scandinavian styles are also known in coastal Estonia but have been recorded mainly in graves where somewhat later artefact material dominated.³⁹ Some recent finds at the Salme ship burial and Viidumäe cult place on Saaremaa have, however, changed this vision.

Burials in ships or boats have normally been considered a direct Scandinavian impact, both in Finland and Estonia. Cremations in boat-graves, often individual burials with weapons and several hundred boat rivets marking the outline of the now decayed boat were recorded in Finland in about 30 cases. Individual inhumation in a ship is known from Åland.⁴⁰ Numerous boat rivets were uncovered in some north Estonian stone graves as well, notably in Lagedi, where 146 rivets were found dispersed over the grave, in Proosa, where they were in the same burial ground where Scandinavian artefacts were found, and in Rae and Aseri graves.⁴¹ All these burials, except Proosa, could be dated to the 7th century, and were made in stone graves from earlier periods. Whether any of these really was a boat-burial, is not certain, owing to the collective burial rite. In addition, over a thousand boat rivets were recorded on the periphery of a 10th–13th-century stone grave at Viltina, southern Saaremaa, where, nevertheless, they could just indicate old boats that were brought to decay on top of the stone grave.⁴² Smaller numbers of boat rivets are common finds in most stone graves in coastal Estonia though.

39 Jets 2013: 29–44.

40 Anderson 1963.

41 Spreckelsen 1927; Lang 1996: 225–226.

42 Mägi 2002: 61.

5.1.3 *First Vikings at Salme*

The first real ship-graves in the Eastern Baltic were excavated in 2008–2011 at Salme on the island of Saaremaa. The location near a probable, but hitherto not found harbour place at a one-time narrow strait between the main island and the island of Sõrve suggests a place often visited by foreign travellers. Both of the ships contained inhumation burials: seven men were buried in the smaller ship, 34 in the bigger one. The investigation of the material uncovered in these sites is still in progress and the interpretations must therefore be limited to assumptions. However, some aspects strike the eye and can be useful in the context of this book.

Those buried at Salme were, according to general opinion, warriors from the nascent *Svearíki* in Middle Sweden, who, after being killed in a battle, were buried in ships according to their home tradition.⁴³ The origin of at least eight men from both graves is by now also confirmed by strontium isotope analyses.⁴⁴ Dead warriors, especially in ship II, were buried together with luxurious weapons of Scandinavian types, which were frequently ornamented with animal style art.⁴⁵ Some splendid artefacts even had parallels in the princely graves at Valsgårde near Uppsala, or in Finland.⁴⁶ Grave goods in the Salme ship I were clearly less pretentious, the number of burials smaller and their state of preservation worse. The ship I of Salme was smaller, too, and could actually be considered a large boat, probably propelled by oars.⁴⁷

When we compare the find at Salme with other excavated ship-burials, the great number of the dead is primarily what strikes us. The 34 men uncovered in ship II were laid lined up in four layers on top of each other. Jüri Peets, the excavator of most of the ships, has assumed that all burials on both ships were conducted at the same time and were the result of one particular event, probably a lost battle. This proposition is, nevertheless, difficult to prove. The way men were buried in ships I and II differs considerably. Inside ship II, the uppermost layer of the dead was partly separated from the lower ones by a 20–30-cm-thick layer of sand that was presumably intentionally brought in to cover and level

43 Peets *et al.* 2013.

44 Douglas Price *et al.* 2016. However, the strontium analyses never tested the possibility of the men originating from southwestern Finland, where the bedrock is very similar to central Sweden.

45 Peets *et al.* 2011, 2013.

46 Estonian expert of Viking Age ornamentation, Dr. Indrek Jets, verbal information, 22.10.2016.

47 Konsa *et al.* 2009; Allmäe *et al.* 2011.

the lower burials. Two or even three lower layers of the dead were, however, so close to each other that they were probably buried at the same time.

The ship-burials at Salme were partly destroyed even before the excavations, making the interpretation of several building constructions most problematic. It is, however, possible to assume that the dead in both ships had originally been placed in wooden burial chambers. Skeletons in the Salme I grave were so poorly preserved that most interpretations of their original position in the boat remain only speculation.⁴⁸ In the Salme ship II, the first and the third layer layers of dead were covered with sand, and the latest deceased warriors on top of the 20–30-cm-thick sand were protected by a layer of stones on top of them. The compact location of the skeletons in a comparatively small area (basically 3 × 4 m) suggests that they were originally deposited within a restricted space. A possible collapsed burial chamber or wooden building was also indicated by an area of darker organic material right outside the western side of the ship, immediately adjoining the area of the skeletons (Figure 5.10.),⁴⁹ as well as the fact that the skeletons were marked, in addition to the layer of stones right on top of them, by stones mixed with modern rubbish such as plastic or glass.⁵⁰ The original surface had probably formed a hollow here that was filled up in the course of levelling all the ground in the second half of the 20th century. Most of the skeletons were found in anatomically correct order, but some were only preserved in parts or disturbed. One of the skeletons actually consisted merely of a skull, and two skeletons of only shinbones. A small amount of unarticulated human bones was also found in the burial area.⁵¹

Although the warriors at Salme presumably originated from Middle Sweden, several local features related to the cultural background of Saaremaa Island can be identified in the burial rites. A proper comparison with the local culture is unfortunately hindered by the remarkable shortage of archaeological evidence in 7th–8th-century Saaremaa (see above), allowing us only to draw parallels with two contemporary pre-Viking Age hill-forts. The latest burials before the Salme find are known from the funerary house at Lepna, in the vicinity of another harbour site in southern Saaremaa, where the last bones were, according to the date based on grave goods, brought in the first half of the 7th century. Approximately in the same period, the 7th–8th centuries, a dramatic alteration of burial rites seems to have started. The first archaeologically excavated individual cremation graves inside stone circles, the subsequent grave form in Saaremaa, have been dated to the 10th century, although some old amateur

48 Allmäe *et al.* 2011.

49 Peets *et al.* 2013: Fig. 3.

50 Peets *et al.* 2011: Fig. 2.

51 Peets *et al.* 2013.



FIGURE 5.10 *Three layers of Salme ship II.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY J. PEETS AND R. MALDRE. FROM: PEETS *ET AL.* 2013:
FIG. 3.

excavations suggest that this grave form might have started to spread on the islands earlier.⁵² These stone circle graves resembled a grave form on Gotland that appeared at approximately the same time (Figure 5.11.). This alteration coincided with changes in the cultural spheres: the former intensive communication between Saaremaa and the eastern and south-eastern coast of the Baltic

52 Mägi 2002: 125–126.



FIGURE 5.11 *Viking Age stone circle graves at Püla, Saaremaa.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY M. MÄGI.

was replaced by close contacts between the islands of Saaremaa and Gotland, as well as with Middle Sweden.⁵³

Collective burials at Salme can be considered a symbiosis of the foreign and the local. The burials in ship I in particular demonstrate similarity with native customs. We can assume that if new burials had been added to the ship's burial chamber, as was customary in local funeral houses, it would soon have presented the same appearance as, for instance, in Lepna – uncremated human bones in disorder on the floor and along the walls of a pit-house, together with abundant artefacts, including a great number of weapons.⁵⁴ Instead of a house built of timber and stone, in Salme there were ships with a burial chambers, where the burials consisted not of members of a particular family, but of foreign ship crews. The idea of collectivism is present in both cases, although in one example it was based on family affiliation, on the other on a common martial group.

Men in ship II at Salme seem to have been buried more attentively, with clearly more abundant and precious goods than in ship I; however, this image may be biased, at least partly, by the better preservation of ship II. Still, only two sword blade fragments and one sword handle were recorded in ship I while all 34 men in ship II had apparently been supplied with at least one sword, some of them probably both with a double-edged sword and a single-edged scamasax. Sword handles and metal decorations of scabbards were sometimes of gilded bronze and decorated with luxurious patterns in animal style art. Many skeletons bear traces of violent death, suggesting that they had perished in combat.

However, the stacking of dead warriors in lines and in several layers on top of each other resembles more the native burial customs of Saaremaa than princely boat graves in Middle Sweden, even if this choice was dictated by the need to bury many noble warriors quickly in a foreign country. Burial in a ship was reserved only for especially distinguished persons in Middle Sweden, and it is hard to believe that as many as 41 of them were killed in a battle in Saaremaa. One can presume that in case of great human loss, cremations were chosen for most casualties instead of complicated ship burial with dubious prospects for guaranteeing respect towards the funeral ships that, as we know, were not even covered by any mound. That the fallen men were selected to be buried collectively, apparently seeing this form of burial as most respectful, may indicate the possibility that those who conducted the actual funeral were mainly locals, who mixed Scandinavian traditions with their native ones.

53 Mägi 2006.

54 Mägi 2005a.



FIGURE 5.12 Some 8th–9th-century finds from Viidumäe, Saaremaa. 1–7 – in private possession, 8–11 – TLU AI 7281: 74, 37, 25, 26.
PHOTOGRAPHS BY I. JETS AND M. MÄGI.

The great number of arrow-heads found at Salme – 91 in ship II and six in ship I – seemed at first glimpse unusual for Estonia, where arrow-heads very seldom occur as grave goods, even in later periods. The locations of most arrow-heads at Salme suggest that they were not ordinary grave goods either. Although some of these finds were made together with the skeletons, where they perhaps indicated the cause of death, a great many arrow-heads were recorded

together with ship rivets. These arrows had been shot into the sides of the ship, which Peets has chosen to interpret as a sign of a battle.⁵⁵ An alternative interpretation can be that the arrows were shot in the course of some funeral ritual.

The use of arrow-shooting in local religious rites was confirmed by excavation in 2014 at Viidumäe, West Saaremaa, where a cult place belonging to the same time as Salme was found. Spread over an area of about 1.5 ha, in a steep scarp and at the foot of it, between the scarp and a former lake or wetland, a great number of decorative pins and other artefacts, including weapons, were found stuck into the sandy ground or sunken in the lake (Figure 5.12.). To date, about 30 arrow-heads have been found, concentrated in certain areas at the foot of the scarp. In one of these areas, a collection of mixed human bones, all uncremated but fragmentary, were uncovered in a narrow ditch. The bones of men, women, and children had been lying on the ground for a while before they were gathered in the ditch, probably forming a pile in and around it. That these people had probably been sacrificed was indicated by several traumas caused by edged weapons.⁵⁶ Two arrow-heads and a large nail were found in the deposit of bones, while other artefacts were completely absent in this area.

The arrow-heads at Viidumäe seem to have been shot in the course of some ritual. All arrow- and spear-heads at this site belonged to the same 7th–9th-century types as the ones at Salme, thus indicating that local weaponry already resembled the Scandinavian style: weapons at Viidumäe were found in the same context with jewellery of local types. In addition, several 7th–8th-century decorative pins, although morphologically characteristic of Saaremaa, bore Germanic animal style decoration that had been adapted and developed locally.⁵⁷ The big pre-Viking period decorative pins were presumably more male than female attributes, and finding them together with weapons was therefore predictable.

Similar weaponry and the adaptation of animal art suggest a shared warrior culture in the coastal areas of present-day central Sweden, Finland, and Estonia. The first signs of this cultural phenomenon appeared as early as the 6th century and gained momentum in the 8th century. Starting from the second half of the 10th century, when the burial customs in Saaremaa, as well as in the rest of coastal Estonia, Finland, and Livonia, again started to require abundant grave goods, the common cultural sphere of warriors becomes clearly obvious. It is hardly coincidental that the shared warrior culture developed in the same era as when the communication networks between east and west started to take shape. One indication of these processes is the find of dead warriors at

55 Peets *et al.* 2013.

56 Mägi *et al.* 2015.

57 Jets & Mägi 2015.

Salme, who were buried following partly Scandinavian, partly local cultural traditions.

5.1.4 Ynglinga-Kings Adventuring in the East

Sources illuminating the pre-Viking period Eastern Baltic areas are meagre and most doubtful. However hypothetically, some of them still enable us to draw parallels with the archaeological evidence and thus illuminate the background that could have been behind such an unusual find as the burials at Salme. Primarily, stories describing the descent of the central Swedish royal Ynglinga-family can be cited here. These narratives were properly written down only in the early 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, but were partly relying on the much earlier, late-9th-century *Ynglingatal*.⁵⁸ At least one of the kings in petty *Svearíki*, Yngvar, was killed somewhere in the present-day Estonia.

After that Sweden was ruled by Yngvar, the son of King Eystein. He was a great man of war and frequently on board his warships, because before his time there had been many incursions made in Sweden, both by Danes and hordes from *Austrvegr*. King Yngvar concluded a peace with the Danes, and then took to harrying in *Austrvegr*. One summer he summoned his fleet and proceeded to *Estland* where he harried at a place called *at Stein*. Then the men of *Eistland* came upon him with a great host, and there was a battle. The army of the country was so strong that the Swedes were unable to withstand them. King Yngvar was slain then, and his host fled. He is buried in a mound there, close by the sea, in *Aðalsýsla*. After this defeat the Swedes returned home.⁵⁹

Yngvar's son Onund however avenged his father.⁶⁰

Onund was the name of the son of Yngvar, who succeeded him. In his days, good peace prevailed in *Svíþjóð* [Sweden], and he became very wealthy in chattels. King Onund proceeded with his host to *Eistland* to avenge his father. He landed, and harried far and wide and made great booty. In the fall he returned to Sweden. In his days there was great prosperity/fruitful seasons in Sweden.

These events can hypothetically be dated to the 7th century, but in any case to the time before the Viking Age. In 760–840 the winters were unusually cold,

58 Skre 2007c.

59 The Saga of the Ynglings, 32, with addition from the translation into Russian given in Jackson 2012: 72–73.

60 The Saga of the Ynglings, 33.

and the Viking Age climatic optimum started only after that period.⁶¹ The mythological character of the earliest kings in the *Ynglinga Saga*, combined with the mention of “fruitful seasons” presumably refers to the times before the cold winters, rather than to the later period. It fits perfectly with some radiocarbon dating of the Salme ships to the period in the first half up till the middle of the 8th century.⁶²

Svearíki or *Sveaveldi*, where Yngvar and Onund came from, were terms generally used for present-day Middle Sweden, or for the Swedish dominion in a broader sense. The place name *Svíþjóð* normally appeared in Scandinavian texts as a synonym for these names.⁶³ The name has been mentioned in this sense on at least three runic stones.⁶⁴ Still, in addition to the “real” *Svíþjóð* some sources, notably the *Ynglinga Saga*, also refer to *Svíþjóð* the Great, or *Svíþjóð* the Cold, probably denoting areas in Eastern Europe, Viking Age *Rus*.⁶⁵

Svíþjóð the Great, or the Cold ... The northern part of *Svíþjóð* is uncultivated on account of frost and cold, just as the southern part of *Bláland* [some districts in Africa] is a desert because of the heat of the sun. In *Svíþjóð* there are many large provinces. There are also many tribes and many tongues.⁶⁶

That *Svíþjóð*, or *Svíþjóð* the Great potentially could also embrace the northern areas of the Eastern Baltic, is illustrated in the fabulous but nevertheless very descriptive story of the end of King Sveigthir:⁶⁷

He [Sveigthir] made a vow that he would try to find God Home and Óthin the Old. With eleven others he fared widely about the world. He came to the land of Turks [?] and *Svíþjóð* the Great, and there he met many of his kinsmen ... Then he returned to *Svíþjóð* and remained at home for a while.

Sveigthir set out again to look for God Home. In the eastern part of *Svíþjóð* there is a large estate, called *at Steini*. There stands a boulder as big as a large house. In the evening, after sunset, when Sveigthir went from the feast to his sleeping quarters he saw that a dwarf was sitting

61 Gunn 2000.

62 Konsa *et al.* 2009; Peets *et al.* 2013.

63 Jackson 2012: 86.

64 Arrhenius 2007.

65 Jackson 2012: 77.

66 The Saga of the Ynglings, 1.

67 The Saga of the Ynglings, 12.

by the boulder. Sveigthir and his men were very drunk and ran toward the boulder. The dwarf stood in the doorway [of the rock] and called to Sveigthir, inviting him to enter in if he would see Óthin. Sveigthir ran in, and the rock at once closed after him, and he never came out again.

The place called *at Steini* appears in the same text some paragraphs later, where it is clearly connected with *Estland* (see above). It is worth mentioning here that huge boulders (with diameters above 25 m) are characteristic of Estonia, where about 110 such boulders are known, predominantly in the western and north-western coasts and islands. Only about ten stones of somewhat comparable size are known elsewhere in Northern Europe.⁶⁸ Considering that the story of King Sveigthir probably referred to some place in a coastal zone, close to arable lands, the most probable candidate is the area around present Tallinn, which also fits very well as the target of a plundering raid arranged by King Yngvar a few generations later. What could have been the real cause of the death of Sveigthir, however, remains a secret.

5.2 Viking Colonies in the Southern Half of the Eastern Baltic

Sudden intensification of Scandinavian contacts in the Migration period has been also reported by several archaeologists dealing with the south-eastern coast of the Baltic. According to Vlasdas Žulkus, Scandinavian and European import items appeared in Couronia as early as the 5th century, and the activity of Scandinavians increased during the 6th–7th centuries. The phenomenon was characteristic of mainly present coastal Lithuania, and did not occur to the same extent in the rest of the country; he does not make any comparison with the Scandinavian impact in the northern coastal areas in the Eastern Baltic.⁶⁹

In the coastal areas between Couronia and the Vistula River the strengthening of Scandinavian influences has also been reported, especially from the 6th century onwards.⁷⁰ Karen Høilund Nielsen has drawn attention to close contacts between Gotland and East Baltic areas, especially present-day Latvia, in the 7th century, as indicated by artefact typology. It was a period when Gotland's connections with the Mälars area and south Scandinavia seemed, according to her, to have been interrupted. Høilund Nielsen explained it by reference

68 Pirrus 2009.

69 Žulkus 2000, 2007.

70 Bitner-Wróblewska 2001: 121–127.

to the political situation of the time, for example with the conquest of Öland by Denmark.⁷¹

There are several Couronian hill-forts with a pre-Viking period culture layer, one of them probably Apuolē.⁷² Couronian hill-forts of both the pre-Viking period as well as later centuries, except Grobiņa, are however normally situated at least 20 km from the coast,⁷³ which makes it difficult to see their direct connection with overseas trade routes, although some researchers have claimed to see such a connection.⁷⁴

5.2.1 *The First Viking Colony in the East – Grobiņa*

The earliest real colony of eastern Vikings is also known from the southern half of the Eastern Baltic. This is Grobiņa in the estuary of the small Ālande River, in the vicinity of a lagoon that offered protection in the long and straight Couronian coast. On the modern maps it is situated in Latvia, a few kilometres from the Lithuanian border. Although often appearing on maps as a Viking Age nodal point, (Scandinavian) Grobiņa was predominantly a pre-Viking period phenomenon that had already been abandoned by Scandinavians at the very beginning of the booming era of the eastern trade in the 9th–10th centuries.

Several very Swedish-looking cemeteries have been excavated at Grobiņa, most of them by Francis Balodis and Birger Nerman in 1929–1930. Graves, belonging to both men and women with specific artefacts known from Middle Sweden or Gotland, have been dated to AD 600/650–800/850, thus mainly in the period predating the Viking Age (Figure 5.13.).⁷⁵ Palaeodemographic calculations of the graves has led to an estimate of a local population at one stage of 300 to 500 persons, about half of them adults.⁷⁶ Excavations conducted in the 1960s and 1980s at the same site, as well as some different burial grounds around the hill-fort of Grobiņa have, nevertheless, pointed to consistent local inhabitation throughout prehistory.⁷⁷

The hill-fort of Grobiņa is a medium-size hill-fort on the bank of the Ālande River, with a surface area of 0.36 ha (Figure 5.14.). Small-scale excavations were carried out there before World War II. The culture layer, with some finds of local ceramic ware and some metal artefacts, dated the site to the 9th–13th

71 Høilund Nielsen 2000.

72 Zabiela 2008; Lamm *et al.* 2009.

73 Žulkus 2001; Zabiela 2008.

74 Žulkus 2001; Žulkus & Mindaugas 2009.

75 Nerman 1958.

76 Virse & Ritums 2012 and references.

77 Petrenko & Ozere 1988; Petrenko & Urtāns 1995.



FIGURE 5.13 *Artefacts from an 8th-century grave at Grobiņa Smukumi (LVNM A 7136: 1–23).*
 PHOTOGRAPH BY R. KANIŅŠ. COURTESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM
 OF LATVIA.

centuries.⁷⁸ The early urban centre in the vicinity has been tested archaeologically and was at first estimated to have been 3 ha, but has not been excavated. The latest investigations have indicated the remains of a cultural layer over an area of 20 ha, most of it covered by later buildings. Who lived in the various areas in question, and during what periods, has not been established. The current opinion seems to be that a local settlement existed at the place both before and after the Scandinavian colonisation.⁷⁹

Scandinavian cemeteries with a great number of graves and abundant artefacts of central Swedish or Gotlandic origin leave no doubt that a considerable Scandinavian population once inhabited Grobiņa. Some Scandinavian burial grounds from the same period, that is, approximately 600–850 AD, have also been registered in the neighbourhood of Grobiņa, within a radius of about 20 km, but few of these graves have been excavated.⁸⁰ However, most researchers agree that cultural interaction between the Scandinavians and the local

⁷⁸ Nerman 1958.

⁷⁹ Virse & Ritums 2012.

⁸⁰ Bogucki 2006.



FIGURE 5.14 *Hill-fort at Grobiņa.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY M. MÄGI.



FIGURE 5.15
*8th-century Scandinavian brooch from
Strautiņi near Grobiņa (LVNM A 10797:1).*
PHOTOGRAPH BY R. KANIŅŠ. COUR-
TESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM
OF LATVIA.

Couronians was very limited and of little significance. There are single stray finds of presumably Swedish origin found in the areas outside Grobiņa (Figure 5.15.), and Couronian items were sometimes detected among the grave goods of the colonists, but the two cultural spheres were generally kept separate from one another, at least in material culture.⁸¹ The situation provides a typical

81 Virse & Ritums 2012.

example of the middle ground colonisation according to Chris Gosden's classification (for further details see Section 3.5.).

5.2.2 *Battles for Seeburg and Aputra*

In addition to the Swedish and Gotlandic cemeteries that were excavated at Grobiņa, the existence and history of the place is illuminated by a comparatively long and detailed narrative, provided for us by 9th-century Bishop Rimbert. In his *Vita Ansgarii*, a life-story of his predecessor Bishop Ansgar, several campaigns were described, although the writing in general was devoted to the Apostle of the North himself. The description of King Olaf's campaign to Couronia, according to the following lines, was given as an example of the superiority of the Christian God.⁸²

...the power of the Lord was manifested to the Swedes. For a certain people named *Cori* had in former time been in subjection to the Swedes, but had a long while since rebelled and refused to be in subjection. The Danes, being aware of this, at the time when the bishop had come into Swedish territory [that is, in the 840s], collected a large number of ships, and proceeded to this country, eager to seize their goods and to subdue them again. Their kingdom contained five towns. When the inhabitants knew of their coming they gathered together and began to resist manfully and to defend their property. Having obtained the victory, they massacred half the Danes and plundered their ships, obtaining from them gold and silver and much spoil.

On hearing this, King Olaf and the Swedes, who wished to win for themselves the reputation that they could do what the Danes had not done, and because this people had formerly been subject to them, collected an immense army and proceeded to these parts. In the first instance they came to a town in their kingdom called *Seeburg*. This town, which contained seven thousand fighting men, they ravaged and despoiled and burnt. They left it with strengthened hopes and, having sent away their ships, set out on a five-day journey and hastened with savage intent to another of their towns called *Aputra* in which there were fifteen thousand fighting men. When they reached it, these were shut up in the town, and whilst the one party vigorously attacked the town from outside, the other party defended it from within. In this way eight days went by with the result that, though they fought and waged war from morning till night, and many fell on both sides, neither side obtained the victory. On the ninth day the Swedes, being exhausted by the daily slaughter, began to be distressed, and in their terror considered only how they might

82 Rimbert's Chronicle, 30.

get away. "Here", they said, "we effect nothing and we are far from our ships". For, as we have said, it was five days' journey to the port which contained their ships...

As they were greatly disturbed and knew not what they should do, they resolved to enquire by casting lots whether their gods were willing to aid them either to obtain a victory or to get away from the place where they were. Having cast lots they failed to discover any god who was willing to aid them. And when this was announced to the people there arose much outcry and lamentation in their camp, and all their courage left them. "What", said they, "shall we, unhappy people, do? The gods have departed from us and none of them will aid us. Whither shall we flee? Our ships are far away, and if we flee [those in the city] will follow after us and will utterly destroy us. What hope have we?"

Then the men decided to ask help from the God of the Christians, and were successful:

When all were gathered together with courage and joy to attack the town, and they had invested it and were eager to commence the fight, those inside asked that an opportunity for speech be afforded them, and when the Swedish King had agreed, they immediately said, "We desire peace rather than fighting, and we wish to enter into an agreement with you. In the first place we are prepared to give you for the sake of securing an agreement all the gold and the arms that we took as spoil from the Danes last year. Furthermore, we offer half a pound of silver for each individual man now in this town, and in addition we will pay you the tribute which we formerly paid and will give hostages, for we desire henceforth to be subject and obedient to your rule, as we were in former time".

When this offer had been made, the passions of the young men could not be assuaged, but, being eager for action and devoid of fear, they desired only to fight and said that they would destroy by force of arms the town and all that the people possessed, and would carry them off as captives. The king, however, and his chief men, were of a wiser opinion, and, having accepted their offer and entered into an agreement with them, they gladly returned home, taking with them countless treasures and the thirty hostages that were provided...

This story recalls another narrative earlier in the same book, notably the siege of Birka.⁸³ There is no doubt that the main objective was to praise the Christian God; still, some details may refer to historical circumstances. People that

83 Rimbart's Chronicle, 9.



FIGURE 5.16 *Hill-fort of Apuolė in Lithuania.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY M. MÄGI

were called *Cori* by Rimbert had earlier been under the dominion of Swedes, and the Danes had failed to take over after the locals had rebelled against the Swedes. Rimbert dated the new subjection of the *Cori* by Swedes to 854. The *Seeburg* mentioned in *Vita Ansgarii* is nowadays generally believed to have been Grobiņa, and *Aputra* the hill-fort of Apuolė in Lithuania (Figure 5.16.). This interpretation has become widespread after excavations at both of these hill-forts, although in Grobiņa the excavations were mainly at the cemeteries in the vicinity of the hill-fort.⁸⁴ Birger Nerman suggested, following general paradigms in archaeology before the First World War, that both Grobiņa and Apuolė had been Scandinavian colonies. However, this opinion seems not to be fully justified in the case of Apuolė.⁸⁵

Several other hill-forts in the Eastern Baltic have been proposed as candidates identifiable as *Seeburg* and *Aputra*, both before and after Nerman's excavations.⁸⁶ Archaeological excavations at Grobiņa hill-fort have not confirmed

84 Nerman 1958; Lamm *et al.* 2009.

85 See also Mägi 2010a.

86 For an overview of the different ideas see Mugurēvičs 1997.

Rimbert's description of how this site was plundered and burnt down.⁸⁷ Still, it seems plausible to identify *Seeburg* as Grobiņa – there are no other suitable candidates along the Couronian coast. The name *Seeburg* refers to a location near the coast, and the Scandinavian cemeteries near Grobiņa ceased approximately at the same time as the events described by Rimbert took place. The association of *Aputra* with present-day Apuolē is, however, based mainly on the similarity of these names, and much less on archaeological finds.

As for communication and logistics, there was an interesting detail in Rimbert's narrative of the campaign to Couronia: the Swedes sent their ships to some further harbour and marched to *Aputra* along mainland roads. The journey took five days, a period long enough to reach Apuolē, especially if it involved plundering on the way. Already at *Aputra*, the Swedes were worried about being far away from their ships. Rimbert added an explanation that the harbour with their ships was at a distance of five day's journey; however, it could not have been the harbour near *Seeburg*, since the ships were sent away from there. Accepting the present-day hill-fort Apuolē as *Aputra*, one can assume that the ships sailed southwards to another harbour somewhere near Rucava, where there was another small lagoon or lake near the seashore. Apuolē is situated inland, at approximately the same distance from Grobiņa and Rucava; choosing one way there and another way back, the Swedes avoided going back through the areas that had already been plundered.

5.2.3 *Commercial Nodal Point or Agrarian Colonisation?*

Although some scholars have described Grobiņa as a military support point for Scandinavians, or have considered it an important multi-ethnic trade centre, the latest researchers have started to question this classification.⁸⁸ Mateus Bogucki has questioned the commercial character of Grobiņa, using mainly the argument that the graves there lack coins, weights, and scales, as well as artefacts imported from outside Eastern Scandinavia or Couronia.⁸⁹ Ingrida Liga Virse and Ritvars Ritums added that signs of barter between the Scandinavians and the locals were also absent before the end of the 9th century. Although some Kufic coins and even small hoards consisting of eastern silver have been found in the vicinity of Grobiņa and dated to the end of the 9th century or to the 10th century, they reflect eastern trade carried out by the local Cours.⁹⁰ Bogucki supposed that the hill-fort of Grobiņa did not play an important role

87 Virse & Ritums 2012.

88 Virse & Ritums 2012 and references.

89 Bogucki 2006.

90 Virse & Ritums 2012.

in the economic network of the Baltic zone, but that another, hitherto unknown nodal point must have been situated in the vicinity. Grobiņa was, in his opinion, more an agricultural colony of Eastern Scandinavians, who, for some unknown reason, had moved to the lower reaches of the Ālanda River, lived in the area for about 200 years, and were finally assimilated. Similar migrations can be found in different times and places in history; the colony at Grobiņa can perhaps be compared with the movements of Goths, or with the first colonisers of the North Atlantic, who had a background as outlaws or exiles.⁹¹

Bogucki's observation is worth closer consideration. At the same time, taking into account the time factor and the character of finds, one can find the absence of coins, scales, and weights in mainly pre-Viking period Grobiņa cemeteries completely predictable – these finds generally appear in graves in the 10th century. The paradox has also been pointed out by Bogucki himself. Nevertheless, the main but somewhat questionable argument then remains that Grobiņa could not have been connected with international trade because other *emporia* did not appear before the middle of the 8th century. Accordingly, a trade centre belonging to the 7th century must have been an exception.

During the boom in the east–west trade over the Baltic Sea, that is, in the 9th–10th centuries, Grobiņa had stopped functioning as sort of international centre. However, trade centres already existed before the 9th century, and some of them appeared as early as the 6th century.⁹² Most of these early sites were inhabited seasonally or semi-seasonally.

The location of Grobiņa is topographically definitely the most suitable for landing along the long and straight Couronian coast. The present-day Liepāja Lake, formerly a lagoon, provided safe entrance from the open sea; the hill-fort and cemeteries were situated 4–5 km upstream along a small river. The complex stood on the edge of a large cluster of arable lands that provided it with everyday supplies. The pattern of the cultural landscape resembles that around Iru or Pada on the northern coast of Estonia, which began at about the same time (see later in the text). The only difference when comparing these with Grobiņa is the shortage of 7th–9th-century graves in north Estonia. It is notable that a similar pattern of cultural landscape never otherwise occurred along the present-day Latvian or Lithuanian coast, but was quite common along the north Estonian and Saaremaa coasts (for more detail, see topic 5.3.1.).

Trade or at least maritime communications are the likeliest reasons for the location of Grobiņa. If we accept calculations based on the cemeteries, stating that the size of the Scandinavian population at Grobiņa could have been 300–500 individuals, one might question their subsistence resources.

91 Bogucki 2006.

92 Skre 2007b.

It is hard to believe that so many people could exist on the commodities brought there by 7th–8th-century trade. Living mainly off tribute collected from the neighbouring villages is possible, but is not very likely either, especially when taking into account the probable instability of 7th–8th-century political relations. Some scholars have seen similar problems in connection with Scandinavian centres in north–west Russia a century or two later.

As in Grobiņa, Scandinavian jewellery has been found in female graves there, suggesting family immigration. Ingvar Jansson has put forward a theory about immigration patterns to the earliest Scandinavian centres in north–west Russia, mainly Staraya Ladoga, but also the presumed Scandinavian-Baltic Finnic mixed population on the south-eastern banks of Lake Ladoga. According to his opinion, trade (mainly the fur trade), connected with certain forms of tribute-taking, played the major role in the very first phase of the immigration. The next phase included warfare and more politically driven tribute-taking, and together these accelerated agrarian colonisation. Except in the south-eastern Ladoga area, Jansson has however agreed that such colonisation is not visible in archaeological evidence, since local features seemed to prevail everywhere outside the very centres.⁹³

In contrast to Staraya Ladoga, some Scandinavian graveyards are recorded up to about 20 km from the Grobiņa complex. These were presumably burial grounds of central Swedish or Gotlandic farmers from different agrarian units around the centre. The graves suggest at least the partial agricultural character of the Grobiņa settlement, although the accelerator for its foundation, as well as the basis of its existence, was trade and control over a suitable harbour site. People who were buried in the large Scandinavian cemeteries at Grobiņa did not necessarily live in some hitherto unknown central settlement. Some of them could have spent their everyday life in neighbouring farms or were visitors who happened to die at Grobiņa during their journey.

5.2.4 *Centres on the Amber Way*

The topographic location of Grobiņa indicates that the site was not connected with routes leading further east. As was argued in Chapter 4, the most relevant itinerary from Middle Sweden to the eastern caliphates and their silver resources runs along the north Estonian coast. Visiting Grobiņa could mean a long and pointless diversion when sailing from Middle Sweden. Neither is there any point in visiting Grobiņa when starting from Gotland, bound for the Finnish Gulf or the Daugava River. The Couronian coast north from Grobiņa is straight, characterised by dangerous winds and with few landing possibilities, which suggests that most ships starting from the southern tip of Gotland

93 Jansson 1997.

probably preferred to sail along the eastern coast of the island, and then turn directly across the open sea towards the strait between Couronia and Saaremaa. Seafarers sailing northwards from, for instance, the Vistula River along the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea and heading to the Finnish or Riga Bay probably stopped in Grobiņa. However, nothing indicates intensive traffic in this direction; on the contrary, Estonian and Finnish contacts with the south-eastern coasts of the Baltic seem to diminish dramatically in this very period. This correlates with the evidence of archaeological finds in Grobiņa, which indicate contact between southern Couronia, Middle Sweden, and Gotland. There is only the small Ālanda River running through Grobiņa and uniting the complex with local arable lands further east.

Grobiņa's position is most favourable when heading from Middle Sweden or Gotland towards the south-east, not the east. It seems to be the best way when the destination is the Vistula River or south-eastern Europe and Byzantium further away.⁹⁴ This route is known as the Amber Way, according to one of the most essential commodities transported along it (see Section 3.2.7.). Close contacts between Scandinavia and present-day north-east Poland, and from there further on towards Southern Europe and Byzantium, can already be traced in archaeological evidence in periods before the Viking Age.⁹⁵ The intensification of overseas communication in the Baltic Sea, accelerated by the invention of the sail, was marked by the emergence of the Scandinavian colony in Grobiņa in the 7th century. The route through Grobiņa was the most direct way from petty *Svea* kingdoms to Byzantium.

The colony founded by Swedes and Gotlanders in Grobiņa was the first sign of Scandinavian expansion eastwards from the Baltic Sea, which mainly followed routes that already existed. As was mentioned earlier in the text, Scandinavians also showed interest in another relevant Baltic route in the 7th century, the Eastern Way via Saaremaa and north Estonia; however, the 7th-century Scandinavian impact on trade seems to have been of minor importance. Cultural contacts and possible smaller-scale scattered colonisations are recorded on the Finnish coast, and presumably indicate a shared cultural sphere. In Grobiņa, in contrast, such interest resulted in socially complex settlement inside a restricted area, at a place that was a natural nodal point in an internationally relevant route.

The Scandinavian colony in Grobiņa disappeared at the beginning or in the middle of the 9th century, although the site continued to function as a Couronian centre and probably served local trade. It is hard to define archaeologically, after the disappearance of Scandinavian graves, whether the Grobiņa complex

94 See also Nylén 1985.

95 Kaliff 2001.

differs from other similar sites in Couronia. Although Rimbert's chronicle gives the impression that the Swedes, who had already lost their colony once, had now reconquered it, this is not confirmed by archaeological material. One of the explanations for the disappearance is the intensification of eastern trade in Middle Sweden and Gotland, which took place at approximately the same time and led to the gradually diminishing importance of the old Amber Way for Scandinavians.

However, the Swedes' interest towards the south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea did not disappear immediately. The abandonment of their colony in Grobiņa can rather be considered a local, probably violent initiative, than a completely voluntary move back home. There are no archaeological signs indicating gradual assimilation, as Bogucki assumed. Graves with predominantly Scandinavian artefacts simply stopped and were replaced with very local Couronian graves, instead of several burials with mixed ethnic indicators, as one could assume if assimilation had occurred.

A kind of successor to Grobiņa was Kaup-Wiskiauten on the peninsula of Samland, about 200 km further south along the coast. In Kaup-Wiskiauten, or present-day Mokhovoye, quite a number of Scandinavian graves have been excavated in otherwise very local environments. Just as in Grobiņa, no settlement with any Scandinavian traces which could be interpreted as the actual trade centre has so far been unearthed in the vicinity of Kaup-Wiskiauten (see topic 3.4.3.). The earliest graves have been dated to the middle of the 9th century,⁹⁶ thus approximately to the same time as the Scandinavian colony in Grobiņa was abandoned. It has also been pointed out that the artefacts uncovered in the foreign cemeteries at Kaup-Wiskiauten were predominantly Gotlandic or central Swedish up to the early 10th century, and then replaced by more Danish-looking evidence.⁹⁷ Were the first immigrants in Sambia people from Grobiņa? In that case they had moved in accordance with the changing pattern of use on the main trade routes, closer to the region where the big rivers of Nemunas and Vistula had their estuaries. The new site was on the banks of another lagoon, the Couronian Lagoon.

The most essential nodal point of the whole region, Truso (Janów Pomorski), had its beginnings near the estuary of the Vistula River towards the end of the 8th century, thus during the time when Grobiņa was still in use by Scandinavian colonists.⁹⁸ The time of Truso's supremacy, however, was the following

96 Wiskiauten-Mahovoye, <http://www.wiskiauten.eu/index.php?id=graeberfeld&L=1>, 3.12.2014.

97 Wróblewski 2006 and references.

98 Bogucki 2006, 2007.

two centuries. Scandinavians were clearly present in Truso, too, perhaps forming the strongest ethnic group in the multi-ethnic settlement. In the beginning of its existence, up to the mid-9th century, Truso's importance was probably connected with the old Amber Route. It was the period when the area of the later Kiev-Rus could still be considered politically so unstable that travelling through it was too dangerous for large-scale international trade.

The diminishing importance of the Amber Route can be used for explaining some peculiarities in the distribution of early Kufic coins in lands around the Baltic Sea. Most researchers agree that the earliest dirhams reached northern Europe towards the end of the 8th century,⁹⁹ or around the year 800,¹⁰⁰ but most of these areas experienced a real boom of Arabic silver coins during the first half of the 10th century. It is striking, therefore, that Kufic coins found at Truso all belonged to the period between 780–830, while later Kufic coins were very rare in all East Pomerania and Prussia.¹⁰¹ However, this phenomenon was not limited to the surroundings of Truso only, but also occurred in some other districts on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea, e.g. in Arkona, where the latest Kufic coins had been minted around 850.¹⁰² The surroundings of Truso can in the same period be considered one of concentration areas of Kufic coins in present-day Poland. The trade centre and *emporium* of Truso existed until about 1000,¹⁰³ but no dirhams reached there after the mid-9th century.

The particular situation in the lower reaches of the Vistula River can simply be explained by a different route for the Kufic coins which reached the area. It is possible that the coins were transported not via present-day Russia, but along the routes through Central Europe. Some researchers believe that the early Kufic coins did probably reach Truso through Byzantium, a suggestion that is supported by several items indicating intensive communication with the empire in the south.¹⁰⁴ Christoph Kilger has argued against this suggestion, noting that only a few dirhams have been found in Central Europe. He assumed, therefore, that the coins were indeed transported via Russia, but only after the 830s.¹⁰⁵

Kilger's suggestion, however, raises several questions archaeologically. The most convenient route from present-day Russia to Truso was certainly the

99 Talvio 2002: 85.

100 Blackburn 2008: 52.

101 Wróblewski 2006; Bogucki 2007.

102 Kilger 2008: 218–219.

103 Wróblewski 2006.

104 Bogucki 2007.

105 Kilger 2008: 218–219.

Nemunas River that flowed into the Vistula Lagoon until the beginning of the 11th century. Nevertheless, only a few dirhams are uncovered in areas around the river, most of them minted only in the first decades of the 10th century. Dirham finds are rare everywhere in present-day Lithuania.¹⁰⁶ Somewhat more dirhams have been found in the lower reaches of the Daugava River in Latvia, but these hoards were also buried in the 10th century. One of the three coin deposits in the vicinity of Grobiņa dates to the 9th century.¹⁰⁷ Some 9th-century hoards are known along the north Estonian coast, but the greatest part of dirham deposits there were also buried only in the 10th century.

In parallel with the changes visible in the archaeological evidence of Kaup-Wiskiauten, Wojciech Wróblewski has pointed to the change of Scandinavian influence in Truso as well as other Prussian areas: former central Swedish and Gotlandic dominance was replaced by Danish or southern Scandinavian dominance starting from the mid-9th century.¹⁰⁸ It was the period when the Scandinavians left or were forced to leave their colony at Grobiņa. However, looking from the Danish or south Scandinavian side, there was not much point in sailing up to Grobiņa along the Couronian coast. Truso and Kaup-Wiskiauten were probably connected with routes along the rivers Nemunas and Vistula leading towards the areas in the south-east or south; when bound for north-eastern Europe, it was more suitable to sail via Gotland or Middle Sweden. Grobiņa's time was over as usage of the Amber Way decreased in intensity, and the route along the Couronian coast started to serve mainly local trade.

5.3 Pre-viking Period Hill-Forts and Trade Centres along the Eastern Baltic Coast

The Eastern Baltic is, in comparison with Scandinavia, conspicuously rich in hill-forts. The general rule seems to be that the number of hill-forts increases rapidly as one moves further south. Hill-forts were least common in Finland, followed by coastal Estonia. There were already considerably more pre-Viking period hill-forts in Inner-Estonia, especially the south-eastern quarter of the country, most of them small and presumably connected with the local landscape being much hillier than in the coastal areas. The number of hill-forts increased in Latvia and particularly in Lithuania. In all these regions,

106 Duksa 1981.

107 Ducmane & Ozolina 2009: 75–90.

108 Wróblewski 2006.

a relationship between the hill-forts and the network of rivers has been observed, but the actual functions of these sites could probably vary a great deal.

The majority of the hill-forts in the Eastern Baltic have not been archaeologically dated. Their cultural layer is sometimes very thin or lacking, and constructions may be so obscure that it is difficult to classify them as hill-forts at all. Quite a considerable number of Latvian and Lithuanian hill-forts have been interpreted as cult-sites, especially in cases when several contemporary fortifications were found next to each other. Still, certain hill-forts of above average size and with a thick cultural layer can certainly be treated as centres of sorts, especially because several of them have settlements at the foot. The distribution map of the Eastern Baltic hill-forts may well change in the course of future investigations, but some general features of these sites as well as differences between the location and character of the hill-forts in different regions of the Eastern Baltic are now already obvious (Figure 5.17.).

Firstly, differences in continuity of use. Many such places in present-day Latvia and Lithuania were brought into use as early as the Bronze Age or Roman Iron Age, and some activity took place in them during all the periods up to the Middle Ages. Such long-lasting use of hilltops is unknown in Estonia, even though some of the 6th–7th-century hill-forts had been used earlier, typically at the end of the Bronze Age (Iru and Asva). Recent studies by Heiki Valk have however demonstrated that several small hill-forts in the south-eastern part of Estonia were also used in different times, but seldom in all prehistoric periods.¹⁰⁹ It is striking that a great number of Estonian hill-forts were first brought into use in the 6th–8th centuries AD, and several of them formed a complex with a large settlement that was often older than the hill-fort itself.

The appearance of new hill-forts in the 6th–8th centuries also characterised the area of present-day Latvia, where it was, however, much more common than in Estonia to continue using old strongholds from earlier periods.¹¹⁰ The number of hill-forts that began only in the 6th–8th centuries is even smaller in Lithuania.¹¹¹

Secondly, the location of hill-forts in maritime districts. Pre-Viking and Viking period Estonian hill-forts in coastal areas were typically located some kilometres upstream along a river, while Latvian and Lithuanian hill-forts were, in contrast, located at least 20 km from the coast. There is only one exception to this rule – Grobiņa.

¹⁰⁹ Valk 2009.

¹¹⁰ Apals & Mugurēvičs 2001: 378–413.

¹¹¹ Zabiela 2003.

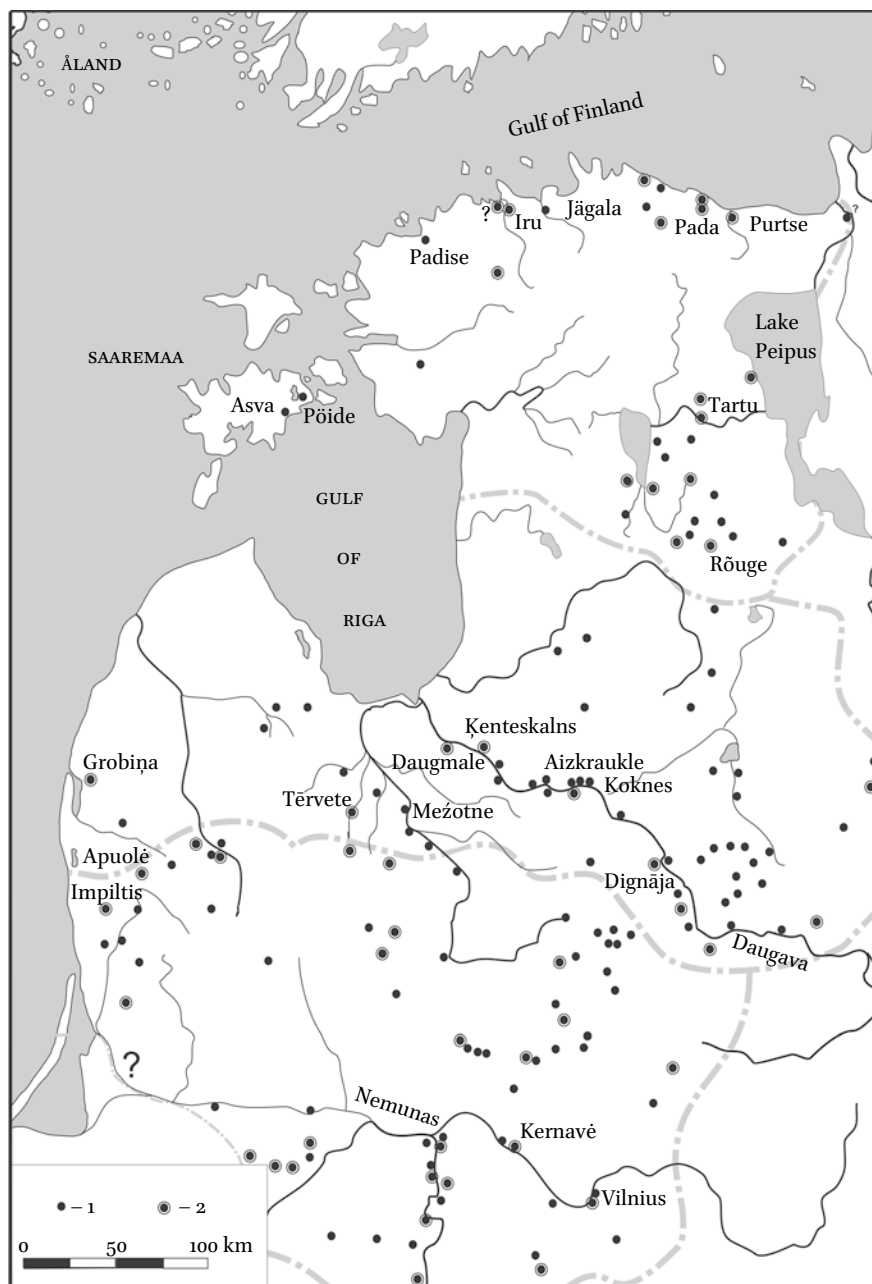


FIGURE 5.17 *Hill-forts in the 7th-early 9th-century Eastern Baltic. Only archaeologically dated sites are shown. 1 – hill-fort; 2 – hill-fort with a considerable settlement at its foot. The map is mainly based on: Apals et al. 1974: Fig. 59; Apals & Mugurēvičs 2001: 378–413; Zabiela 2003; Tõnisson et al. 2008.*

The Eastern Baltic hill-forts with settlements at their feet were probably in one way or another connected with trade and barter, even if embracing only very local communication. The variation in their locations in coastal areas points to different forms of international communication, characterising the northern and southern half of the region, as was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.5.). In Couronia, the straight coast, the proximity of fertile arable lands, and the lack of trade routes leading on to big markets beyond presumably favoured plundering raids rather than relations based on mutual contracts. The latter was more characteristic of the indented coast with smaller islands in present-day Estonia, especially the northern coast, along which ran an internationally relevant eastern route.

5.3.1 *Pre-viking Age Centres along the Estonian Coast and East of It*

Most of the centres that emerged along the north Estonian coast in the 6th–8th centuries were probably connected with trade, primarily with the internationally known route running along the coast. The appearance of the hill-forts and settlements was, accordingly, not an isolated phenomenon, but can be considered part of development processes that characterised the whole of Northern Europe. In the region around the northern half of the Baltic Sea, Helgö in the Mälars district (near what would later become Stockholm) provides a good example.

Helgö, which appeared as early as the 5th century, has recently been interpreted not just as a trading centre but rather an aristocratic residence surrounded by other, dependent households, where a number of people gathered seasonally for trade, negotiations, and ritual activities. Dagfinn Skre has classified Helgö as a “central-place market”, a category that was not directly related to other forms of settlement in Viking Age trade. He suggests that Helgö was not a direct predecessor of Birka, as had generally been believed earlier, but a settlement based on different functions. The site also continued to exist after around 800 AD, when a nodal point, Birka, appeared on another small island about 10 km away.¹¹²

A similar process seems to have taken place in the north Estonian harbour site at Tallinn Bay. The most prominent centre here was Iru, a big hill-fort with a large settlement at its foot on the bank of the Pirita River, at the edge of present-day Tallinn (Figure 5.18.). The Pirita River, whose estuary formed a narrow bay reaching deep inland in the 6th–7th centuries, links Tallinn Bay with some of the most fertile arable lands in north Estonia. The hill-fort and settlement were

112 Skre 2007b.



FIGURE 5.18 *Hill-fort of Iru in late 1930s, photographer unknown (A1/fk 4047).*
COURTESY OF ARCHIVE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH COLLECTIONS,
TALLINN UNIVERSITY.

situated 3–4 km upstream, in a U-shaped river bend with extraordinarily high and steep banks.

The hill-fort had been inhabited as early as the Bronze Age, was then abandoned for about a thousand years, and was brought into use again in the 6th century AD.¹¹³ In the 7th century, human activity also started in the nearby settlement. The culture layer in the Iru complex was, in comparison with other settlements or hill-forts known from 7th–8th-century Estonia, intensive enough to inspire Valter Lang to put forward a theory about the majority of people in the river basin moving over to Iru in the 7th century (for the theories of Lang and criticism of them see topic 3.4.2.).¹¹⁴

In the 6th century only a small hill-fort (with an area of 1000–1100 m²) on the so-called northern plateau was occupied, but by 600 AD settlement had spread, now also covering the southern plateau (0.4 ha). The northern stronghold had burned down around 700, the larger southern one around 850. The latter was built up again and fortified with walls.¹¹⁵ As will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, the boom of the Iru complex dated, however, to the Viking Age.

¹¹³ Lang 1996: 34–104.

¹¹⁴ Lang 1996: 476–477.

¹¹⁵ Lang 1996: 101–104.



FIGURE 5.19 *Foreign artefacts from north Estonian hill-forts. 1 – brooch from central Dnepr River (TLU AI 3849), 2 – buckle pin from Pomerania (TLU AI 3248: 433). PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.*

Iru can probably be classified as a trade centre, where numerous people gathered in the trading season. It is likely that the place functioned as a political centre as well, and had in one area a permanent population, consisting of an elite family and dependent households. A numerous permanent population had in pre-Viking and Viking Age circumstances caused problems with subsistence – the site remains only marginally accessible to arable land. Most of the people who from time to time visited the Iru centre probably lived in villages and farms in the vicinity of their arable lands most of the year.¹¹⁶

Archaeological excavations at the pre-Viking part of Iru have yielded mainly ceramics, but also some metal finds. The only finds from the period 500–700 AD that were clearly related to long-distance trade were a strap end and a buckle pin from present-day north-east Poland (Figure 5.19:1).¹¹⁷ The archaeological evidence of the Iru complex can thus be compared with, for instance, the contemporary Staraya Ladoga, which in the 8th century was an open settlement without fortifications.¹¹⁸ The difference in the size of excavations should be pointed out here – Staraya Ladoga has been investigated many times more intensively than Iru.¹¹⁹ Still, the earliest layers in Staraya Ladoga were dominated by local material as well, with the quantity of artefacts indicating

¹¹⁶ Mägi 2007b, 2013a.

¹¹⁷ Lang 1996: 101.

¹¹⁸ See e.g. Sindbæk 2005: 210–233.

¹¹⁹ Excavations at Iru were conducted during comparatively long periods in the 1930s, 1950s, and 1980s, but a great deal of these excavations concentrated on fortification structures.

far-reaching contacts were many times smaller than in the 9th–10th-century layers of the site.

Another, somewhat similar complex of a hill-fort and settlement is known from Pada in north Estonia, about 10 km from the coast, on the bank of the small Pada River (see also Section 6.2.4.). The hill-fort (Pada II) is approximately of the same size as Iru, and the settlement layer is intensive and covers 4–5 ha. Interestingly, there was another contemporary hill-fort and settlement complex between Pada and the sea – Koila. It is hardly any coincidence that Iru, Pada, and Koila were all abandoned around 1000 AD, in accordance with the gradual cessation of the flow of eastern silver, as well as the abandonment of several trade centres.

The emergence or growing influence of the eastern route can also be seen behind the appearance of hill-forts in Padise and Jägala. The Pre-Viking and Viking Age cultural layer at Padise, about 4 km from the pre-Viking Age sea coast, was obscure, consisting of wooden fortifications dated to the 7th–10th centuries. The site was probably abandoned around 1000 AD as well, but later re-used in the 12th–13th centuries.¹²⁰ The big hill-fort of Jägala, 15 km eastwards from Iru and 1 km from the sea, had been in use in earlier periods, but also in the 5th–7th centuries, according to radiocarbon analysis. An early 7th-century brooch originating from the central reaches of the Dnepr River has been found there (Figure 5.19:2).¹²¹

Somewhat later than Iru, in the middle of the 8th century, Staraya Ladoga was established in present-day Russia.¹²² The earliest settlement in Staraya Ladoga revealed only a few traces of the presence of Scandinavians, and was, in this aspect, similar to Iru. Another similarity was the presence of a hill-fort Ljubscha 2 km from the Staraya Ladoga settlement, on the other side of the Volkhov River (Figure 5.20.). The hill-fort is estimated to have been erected before the trade settlement, in the second part of the 7th century, on the place of a 3rd–4th-century open settlement. As in Iru, its fortifications were re-built partly of stone, which might have happened already in the middle of the 9th century. The hill-fort was abandoned in late 9th or early 10th century.¹²³

The Ljubscha hill-fort marked the beginning of the old Eastern Way, the period before Scandinavians became active on this trade route. It resembled similar hill-forts along the north Estonian coast that appeared at approximately the same time, did not reveal many traces of long-distance trade, but were, according to their location, obviously connected with the international

120 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 194–196.

121 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 189–191; Curta 2012.

122 Nosov 2012.

123 Ryabinin 1999, 2000.

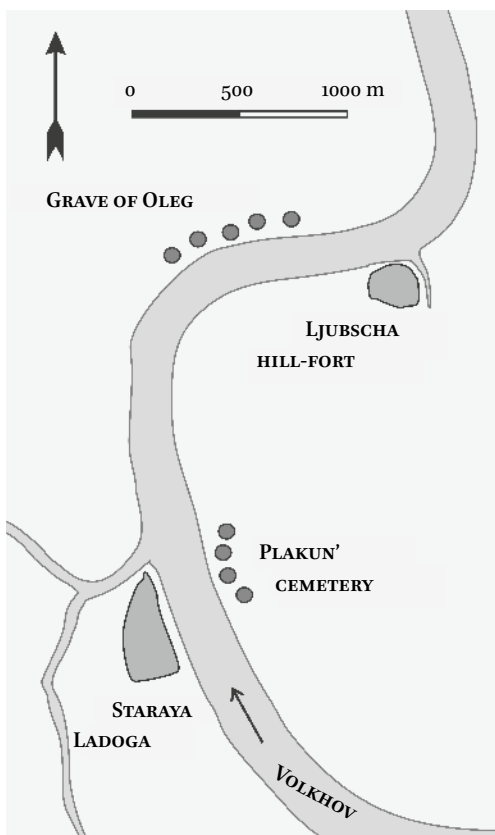


FIGURE 5.20
Pre-Viking and Viking Age archaeological sites around Staraya Ladoga.
Drawn after present-day map.

communication route anyway. The published find material from the Ljubscha hill-fort largely resembled, however, that of Rõuge hill-fort, as well as other contemporary hill-forts in south-east Estonia. Several researchers have also connected the Rõuge hill-fort with eastern trade (more detail in Section 6.2.10.).¹²⁴ The similarity with inland Estonian hill-forts is particularly true for the metal and bone finds and ceramics.¹²⁵ Arrow-heads found in Ljubscha belong to types that were earlier considered Scandinavian, but which, according to the latest finds, were also widespread in other areas around the northern part of the Baltic Sea, including Estonia (e.g. the hill-forts of Rõuge and Iru, or the sacrificial place at Viidumäe on Saaremaa).

The Ljubscha hill-fort long stayed in use during the period when the trading place of Staraya Ladoga functioned. The latter became more and more

¹²⁴ Leimus & Kiudsoo 2004.

¹²⁵ In Ljubscha Ryabinin 1999: Figs 13–19; 2000: Fig. 26; in Estonia Aun 1992: Figs 15, 20, 22, 23, Pls V–XXXI, especially XXVII, 7ff.

dominated by Scandinavians in course of time. In Ljubscha, however, no Scandinavian artefacts have been found so far, and the material seems to have stayed local Baltic Finnic. In this context it is interesting to note that Ljubscha's position downstream from the Staraya Ladoga settlement indicates its function as a outpost of the trading settlement – all ships sailing upstream had to pass the fortification of Ljubscha about 2 km before the settlement itself. This seems to be an ideal strategic position. The position was, however, lost approximately at the end of the 9th century, when the fortification of Ljubscha was abandoned, apparently soon after the settlement of Staraya Ladoga itself was fortified with an earthen wall.¹²⁶ We can only guess that the shift indicated the suddenly increased Scandinavian influence in the eastern trade (see in more detail Chapter 6).

More hill-forts and trading centres appeared on the scene in the 8th century. When Birka was established on the western coast of the Baltic Sea, Tartu appeared in eastern Estonia.¹²⁷ On eastern Saaremaa a complex consisting of a hill-fort at Pöide and a harbour site at Tornimäe was brought into use, while another Saaremaa hill-fort was re-established at the site of an old Bronze Age trade centre at Asva.¹²⁸

5.3.2 *Hill-Forts Indicating River-Routes*

A number of hill-forts were built or re-used in 6th–7th-century Latvia, especially along the River Daugava. In the lower reaches of the big river, several hill-forts had already been established in the Bronze Age, Aizkraukle and Daugmale probably being the most prominent of them.¹²⁹ Further east along the river, the hill-forts of Koknes and Dignāja should be mentioned, together with several others, which were probably not of the same importance.¹³⁰ A settlement in the vicinity of later Polotsk further along the River Daugava also seems to have been established in the 8th century, and this existed until the 10th century.¹³¹

The hill-forts along the River Daugava certainly marked a communication route that ran to the River Dnepr, the central areas of Kiev-Rus and Constantinople further south. Although the way was used as early as the Bronze Age, it is difficult to define it as a very significant itinerary through the Eastern Baltic in the 7th–9th centuries. This was before Kiev-Rus appeared on the scene,

¹²⁶ Kuzmin 2008.

¹²⁷ Tvauri 2001: 245–246.

¹²⁸ Mägi 2011b.

¹²⁹ Zemītis 2007; Šnē 2009.

¹³⁰ Stubavs 1966; Šnē 2009.

¹³¹ Gurevitch 1970.

and travelling through the area that formed its territory in the following centuries was presumably still dangerous and complicated. As was demonstrated before, the old Amber Way was probably the first choice when travelling from the Baltic Sea to Byzantium.

Archaeological evidence around the Daugava River indicates hardly any special Scandinavian interest in this route as early as the 7th–8th centuries, especially when compared with other Eastern Baltic itineraries of this time. The large number of hill-forts on the banks of the Daugava River, however, points to comparatively intensive local or regional trade along this route before the Viking Age. The same is true for the Nemunas River in present-day Lithuania, which was also lined with a great number of hill-forts, many of them established long before the Viking Age.

5.4 Conclusions

The 7th–8th centuries in the Eastern Baltic were characterised by the intensification of long-distance communication that was clearly also reflected in archaeological evidence. These were routes and networks that had actually existed long before. The frequent emergence and location of numerous hill-forts, as well as artefactual material, hint at the rapidly increasing relevance of long-distance traffic since the 7th century.

The most essential communication routes of the period were certainly the Amber Way along the southern Couronian coast, and the Eastern Way along the south-western Finnish and the north Estonian coasts. It is notably in this period before the Viking Age that a number of items, especially jewellery and belt fittings originating from the basins of the Volga and Kama Rivers, have been found in Finland and Estonia. The vision of long-distance relations is supported by originally Scandinavian artefacts found in the same areas. The latter probably indicated not just relationships but also the evolving interest of Middle Swedish and Gotlandic seafarers in obtaining exotic ware from the east and fur of high quality from the northern areas. The impact of the area that forms present-day Sweden was particularly strong in coastal Finland, where it was probably based on both family affiliation and vassalage. In the 8th century the first signs of shared warrior culture in the coastal areas of Middle Sweden, Gotland, Finland, and Estonia became obvious.

The early network of eastern trade, mainly for obtaining fur but also other commodities, was based on relationships between local Baltic Finnic and Finno-Ugrian groups, which had the advantage of language similarity. It may have been a system built on barter between neighbours, forming a network that could reach far towards the east. Trading places connected with these

networks appeared in the densely populated north Estonian coast, most of them supported by hill-forts. Some of them, at least, were residences of the local elite, and thus also functioned as political centres. The population of such places could increase several times during certain periods of the year. Scandinavian influence in these 7th-early 9th-century central places was modest.

The very first Scandinavian interest in the eastern networks can be seen in the luxurious artefacts found in the Proosa grave, as well as in several places in present-day Finland and Karelia. Still, even in the initially unfortified trading place that appeared in the late 8th century in Staraya Ladoga, evidence of Scandinavian cultural influence was modest in the earliest layers. This changed, however, in the following period.

Archaeological material indicates that the main concern of the 7th–9th-century eastern Swedes was directed towards the south–east, to the routes to Byzantium. Particular evidence is the emergence of a Scandinavian colony, perhaps even an agricultural colony, at Grobiņa in the first part of the 7th century. It was joined by the trading place at Truso towards the end of the 8th century, and later by Kaup-Wiskiauten. Here, too, the Scandinavians established themselves on a route that had functioned before, when it was probably based, at least in its northern part, on a network consisting of groups speaking Baltic languages. It is, however, worth noting the different mode of communication on the Amber Way, compared with the Eastern Way – at the same time as the gradual Scandinavisation of the warrior stratum took place on the northern coasts of the Eastern Baltic, the Scandinavian impact on Couronian society was restricted to only certain, comparatively small areas.

The abandonment of the Grobiņa colony at the very beginning of the Viking Age indicates the changing relevance of trade routes. It was certainly given impetus by the Viking eastern expansion to *Garðaríki*, as well as by the development of safety on roads through present-day Russia. Grobiņa was situated in a gap between more essential long-distance routes and lost a great part of its importance for international trade, although it continued to function as a more local centre.

The Daugava route seems to have been used in the pre-Viking period mainly by peoples inhabiting areas immediately around it, most of them probably speaking Baltic languages. At that time international interest in this itinerary was modest. It was topographically not advantageous when travelling further east, and in the 7th-early 9th centuries it was still too risky for travellers who wanted to go to Byzantium. The local markets along the big river were probably not attractive enough to arouse international interest. This situation changed substantially in the Viking Age, and particularly in the 11th century.

West Goes East: Viking Age Long-distance Communication and the Eastern Baltic 850-ca. 1000

The period 950–1000 witnessed a boom in Baltic eastern trade, when a massive amount of silver originating from faraway oriental countries flowed to the areas around the Baltic Sea. Trading centres that had appeared on the scene before the 9th century flourished in this favourable situation. Birka, Staraya Ladoga, Hedeby, Truso, and Wolin stood out in this context, while there were a great number of smaller or sometimes even only hypothetically known trade centres, e.g. Åhus and Kaup. Hill-forts and adjacent settlements along the Eastern Baltic coast, most of them established in the previous period as well, continued their existence in the same manner.

Most modern researchers agree that the abundant Viking Age dirhams found in the areas around the Baltic Sea were a result of mercantile connections, although some have also argued for plundering raids and accompanying tribute-paying (see Section 1.3.2.).¹ It is striking that some selected regions in the Baltic Rim were marked by extraordinarily abundant finds of Kufic coins, while others were almost empty of them. As for the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, the number of dirhams was remarkably high in the area of present-day Estonia, about half as common in present-day Latvia and quite modest, compared with these areas, in mainland Finland and the rest of the Baltic States. When one follows the topography of the region, it is obvious that the distribution of dirhams marked the most relevant communication routes of international trade.

The stream of dirhams to the countries around the Baltic Sea stopped comparatively abruptly in the 970s, although the last ones reached Russia and the Eastern Baltic even as late as the first half of the 11th century. The period around the year 1000 AD was dramatic in many other aspects as well, indicated by changes in social structures and cultural landscapes of areas around the Baltic. A number of old centres were abandoned and new ones appeared, sometimes in the same locality. Power was consolidated and early states appeared in areas along the southern and western coasts of the sea, as well as in Russia, and deepening social stratification has normally been highlighted in the Eastern Baltic societies as well. In some areas, including present-day

¹ Sawyer 1985.

Estonia, the alterations can, however, be assumed to have been primarily due to the end of the boom in the eastern trade.

In the Eastern Baltic region, particularly the northern part of it, the whole period around 1000 AD was a revolutionary time with a number of changes. Most of them cannot be dated more precisely. This chapter therefore takes into consideration phenomena that existed approximately until the beginning of the 11th century and were mainly connected with the 9th–10th centuries. Phenomena that essentially belonged to the 11th century will be looked at more closely in the last chapter.

6.1 Viking Age Centres Connected with International Trade Routes in the Eastern Baltic

The previous chapters of this book demonstrated that a great part of communication in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic was presumably defined by contracts, close mutual relationships, and a shared culture in the martial sphere (Figure 3.2.). The routes along the north Estonian and Saaremaa coasts were marked by several complexes consisting of a hill-fort and an adjacent settlement, normally located a few kilometres upstream on some smaller river. These places were probably connected with trade, and most of them started as early as the last centuries before the Viking Age. The presence of hill-forts and settlements clearly distinguished the north Estonian coast from the southern Finnish one, where little Viking Age evidence has been detected so far and, accordingly, the area can be considered only sparsely inhabited during the period.² Most sea vessels, especially cargo ships, presumably chose to sail along the northern Estonian coast, also because it was somewhat easier topographically.

Most of the present-day Latvian coast was empty of Viking Age hill-forts, but there were abundant hill-forts along the biggest flow of water through the Eastern Baltic – the Daugava River. A great proportion of these hill-forts presumably also functioned as trade centres. Still, the much smaller number of Kufic silver coins along the Daugava River, compared, for instance, to north Estonian coastal areas, seems to indicate that Viking Age communication there was more local or regional. Hill-forts can be assumed to have functioned not only as trading posts, but mainly as administrative centres connected with agricultural hinterlands.

Hill-forts with intensive Viking Age layers in Couronia (except for Grobiņa) seem to have been generally located at least about 20 km from the coast.

² See also Hirviluoto 1978.

Arable lands, particularly in the territory of present-day Lithuania, reached in places to the nearest point on the coast. The location of Couronian hill-forts in the middle of arable lands and not in the peripheral areas along international communication routes seems to indicate that their primary function was to be political and administrative centres, while trade only played a secondary role in their choice of location.

Grobiņa is thus the only Viking Age centre in Couronia that can definitely be connected with international trade, even though it had probably lost a great part of its former significance. The hill-fort in Grobiņa was still in use, but the archaeological evidence there and in its vicinity was, from the mid-9th century, mainly local and similar to other areas in the region.

In addition, Vladas Žulkus has pointed to a settlement in Palanga, the beginning of which he has dated to the 9th century. Its location right on the coast seems to indicate that the place was connected with trade. A somewhat similar place had been located in Žardė, immediately southwards from the present-day Klaipėda.³

6.1.1 *Centres Connected with Trade in the Southern Half of the Eastern Baltic*

As early as the end of the 8th century the biggest trade centre on the south-eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea was established in Truso, near a small lake connected with the lower reaches of the Vistula River. It soon became, to a certain extent, an international centre, where Scandinavians also played a considerable role in the Viking Age.⁴ As a Scandinavian colony, Truso was thus partly contemporary with Grobiņa.⁵

Truso's relevance in the early Viking Age was emphasised by numerous finds of dirhams from its surroundings. However, all Kufic coins found in Truso belong to the period between 780–830, while later dirhams were rare not only around the lower reaches of the Vistula River, but in all East Pomerania and Prussia.⁶ The number of Kufic coins in western Russia is, on the other hand, quite modest until the end of the 9th century, and Birka's find material, too, indicates mainly contacts with western Slavic areas, and not the east, until the 860s.⁷

3 Genys 1997, 2012.

4 Jagodziński 2010: 108; 2015: 21–39.

5 Bogucki 2006, 2007.

6 Wróblewski 2006; Bogucki 2007.

7 Ambrosiani & Bäck 2007.

Truso functioned as a trade centre until the early 11th century, and Scandinavians might also have been present there after the 850s. However, in cemeteries in the vicinity where Scandinavian burials have been unearthed, these all belong to women while male graves demonstrate an entirely local character.⁸ The gender aspect of foreigners seems to indicate connections different from a Scandinavian colony for international trade; here, it was more likely to involve marriages between noble families.

In the beginning of the 9th century, a Scandinavian colony in Kaup-Wiskiauten in the Sambia peninsula got its start. The area around it was populated by local inhabitants as early as the Stone Age, but Scandinavian burials in two cemeteries, including both cremations and inhumations, can be dated to the period from the early- or mid-9th century up to the early 11th century.⁹ Accordingly, the Scandinavians' colony in Kaup seems to have begun at approximately the same time as their earlier colony in Grobiņa ceased.

Lithuanian archaeologists have demonstrated that trade through the Couronian Bay, on the southern end of which Kaup lay, linked Scandinavia and Western Slavic areas with central Lithuania around the later Kaunas.¹⁰ Russian archaeologist Kulakov, on the other hand, has seen Kaup's importance in its location on the so-called Amber Route from south-eastern Baltic coastal areas along the River Vistula down to southern Europe and Byzantium.¹¹

In the 10th century Scandinavian artefacts, although mainly weapons belonging to types that were quite widespread in several areas especially around the northern coasts of the Baltic Sea, also appeared in graves in Linkuhnen in the present-day Kaliningrad district.¹² The site was identified as another Scandinavian colony in the 1930s, but these views have been questioned by some modern researchers. Weapons earlier considered as Scandinavian actually belonged to widespread types and occurred in graves together with otherwise very local Couronian material. The number of clearly Scandinavian artefacts was inconsiderable.¹³ The same impression can be gained from the published find material from Linkuhnen.¹⁴

The vision of Scandinavian colonies in the southern half of the Eastern Baltic is also based on written sources. Saxo Grammaticus mentioned *Sambia* and

8 Wróblewski 2006.

9 Wróblewski 2006; Wiskiauten-Mahovoye, <http://www.wiskiauten.eu/index.php?id=graeberfeld&L=1>, 3.12.2014.

10 Žulkus 2007; Žulkus & Bertašius 2009.

11 Kulakov 1994: 113–123.

12 Engel 1932; Shiroukhov 2012.

13 Speech by Christoph Jahn in a conference "Viking Globalization" in Elbląg, 19.05.2015.

14 Engel 1932.

Sembi in his description of how Danish king Harald Bluetooth's sons attacked the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea in the third quarter of the 10th century. The author described how the Danes killed local men and married local women, after which they lost contact with their old homeland. It is not without good reason, added Saxo, that *Sembi* considered the Danes their ancestors.¹⁵ Following the archaeological evidence, that kind of self-definition might apply more to the northern half of the Eastern Baltic though. The problems connected with the earlier meaning of *Sembia* and *Samland* in written sources were described in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.2.12.).

During the last decade, Lithuanian archaeologists have pointed to two sites on Couronian coasts which seem, however, to belong mainly to the second half of the 11th and later centuries – Palanga and Žardė.¹⁶ Although the archaeologists who have excavated these sites have also demonstrated some pre-11th-century finds, both these sites seem to have been most intensively used in the 12th–13th centuries and will, therefore, be described and discussed in the next chapter.

All these more or less debatable trading places can be characterised as middle ground colonies, whose cultural impact on the areas outside their vicinity was minimal.

6.2 Cultural Landscapes along the Eastern Way

The most important centre directly connected with *Austrvegr* was certainly Birka, which had already been established as early as the end of the 8th century. Researchers dealing with this site assume that the evidence in Birka predominantly demonstrates contacts with Western Europe up to the mid-9th century. Oriental beads appeared in Birka in the middle of the 9th century, but the Arabic and Byzantine cultural impact became more visible in the archaeological evidence only at the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries.¹⁷

Eastwards from the Gulf of Finland, the most important 9th-century centre was Staraya Ladoga, which around 900 AD, at the latest, was surrounded with an earthen wall.¹⁸ It is hardly a coincidence that soon after this event, probably at the beginning of the 10th century, the local outpost of Staraya Ladoga 2 kilometres further down the Volkhov River, the Ljubscha hill-fort, seems to have lost its importance and was abandoned (see Section 5.3.1.). Another

15 Saxo Grammaticus, 10.5.

16 Žulkus 1997: 55–113, 331–332; 2004: 107–118, 240; Genys 1997, 2012.

17 Bäck 2010a.

18 Jansson 1997; Kuzmin 2008.

trading post along the river, Ryurik's Gorodishche, got its start in the middle of the 9th century.¹⁹ These changes suggest that in present-day north-west Russia, as in central Sweden, the eastern trade gained momentum starting from the 850s, a phenomenon that coincided with intensified Scandinavian influence in these processes. The majority of Scandinavian artefactual material in present-day Russia dates to the period between the second half of the 9th century and the end of the 10th century. Scandinavian finds from the period before that, starting from the end of the 8th century, are much more infrequent and found mainly in Staraya Ladoga.²⁰

Russian archaeologist Jevgeni Nosov has suggested, with reference to the distribution map of dirham finds, that in the 9th–10th centuries the route via Lake Ilmen and river systems around it were preferred over the route via Lake Onega and Lake Beloye, when bound for the Volga River.²¹ The emergence of two prominent trade centres on the banks of the Volkhov River obviously supports this opinion. Still, the district around Lake Beloye was attached to the network of eastern trade as well, as is indicated in some settlement sites in this region. Some of them, notably Krutik and Vasutino, were fortified settlements with several finds from the countries around the Baltic Sea, as well as dirhams. These sites that appeared at the end of the 9th century were, however, not even nearly so large or intensively used as Staraya Ladoga or Ryurik's Gorodishche. It should also be pointed out that many more archaeological sites and finds, including imported items, are known in the Lake Beloye region after the mid-10th century.²²

Returning to the Gulf-of-Finland-passage of *Austrvegr*, it is difficult to overlook that the Viking Age archaeological evidence clearly points to the significance of the north Estonian coast between the Bay of Tallinn and the Narva River. In the Viking Age, most of the southern Finnish coast was only sparsely populated or without permanent inhabitation.²³ The majority of cargo ships probably preferred to sail along the densely populated north Estonian coast, where it was possible to overnight in well-supplied harbours. These harbours had proper hinterlands with extensive arable land and villages that were able to supply foreign crews even when ships were forced to stay longer.

The Finnish western coast also seems to be comparatively empty of archaeological finds, although some recent studies have indicated a sparse Viking Age

19 Nosov *et al.* 2005: 28.

20 Pushkina 2004.

21 Nosov *et al.* 2005: 24–25.

22 Makarov *et al.* 2001: 70–94; Makarov 2004.

23 Raninen & Wessman 2014.

inhabitation.²⁴ Many more archaeological finds are known in Finland Proper, that is, in the south–west corner of the country, and in central inland areas in Häme (Swedish Tavastland, see also Section 2.1.). Finland Proper formed part of the communication route from Staraya Ladoga to Birka – at the site of present-day Tallinn ships turned towards the north, crossed the Gulf of Finland at its narrowest point, and further on via the Turku archipelago to the islands of Åland (see in more detail Section 3.2.1.). The archaeological material on the islands of Åland was significantly different from the rest of present-day Finland, and resembled the culture in central Sweden (see Section 5.1.2.).

The last decade's study of archaeological sites in the archipelago of Turku and in the western Uusimaa district in south–west Finland has demonstrated that the former interpretation of these areas as totally unused in prehistory is not true; however, it is still difficult to talk of these districts as densely populated in the Viking Age.²⁵ Nevertheless, the only archaeologically investigated prehistoric landing site – Hitis (Finnish Hiittinen) – was located in the archipelago. Torsten Edgren, who conducted fieldwork at Hitis, has interpreted the site as a seasonal harbour with a secondary ritual function – owing to some finds that were interpreted as offerings. The earliest items at Hitis could be dated to the beginning of the 9th century, and the place was in use during the following centuries. A chapel was erected in the same place later, and the site was mentioned in medieval documents. The find material included not only local, but also Scandinavian and Estonian types of artefacts, dirhams, weights, items relating to crafts, and the only fragment of a runic stone known in Finland. A proper cultural layer was absent nearly everywhere. Edgren believed that Hitis was used as a landing place for foreign ships that sailed along the eastern route.²⁶

The number of prehistoric coins found in mainland Finland is quite modest, which has been interpreted by most researchers as proof that the country was bypassed by the most relevant Viking Age routes.²⁷ Still, a considerable number of Scandinavian-style weapons and other artefacts, frequently decorated in Nordic Animal Style, also characterise the Viking Age archaeological evidence of Finland. These finds indicate close and intensive contacts between Finland and eastern Sweden, which presumably were primarily based on personal contacts and social relationships, and only partly on trade and trade routes.

24 Raninen & Wessman 2014.

25 Tuovinen 2011.

26 Edgren 1995, 2015.

27 Raninen & Wessman 2014; Talvio 2014.

The archaeological evidence of the second half of the 10th century indicates a time of changes, although several new traits only became obvious around the year 1000. Both in Finland and Estonia, numerous grave goods appeared in stone graves with mixed cremations at the end of the 10th century. This change was more dramatic in Estonia, where clearly fewer graves were known from the time before the end of the 10th century, when compared with Finland. On Åland, on the other hand, the end of the 10th century marked the disappearance of archaeologically traceable graves, as well as coins.²⁸

Around the year 975, the trade centre at Birka ceased to function. It was approximately the time when the formerly strongly Scandinavian-dominated trading posts in *Rus'* were re-arranged as political centres of the now consolidated Russian princedoms. One of them was Novgorod where the town had its beginnings around the St. Sophia's Church at the end or in second half of the 10th century, and the earlier hill-fort-settlement centre in Gorodishche was (for some time) abandoned.²⁹ The disappearance of Birka signified not only the decreasing Swedish influence in the east and the independence-gaining processes in *Rus'*, but also the political development inside Sweden. Sigtuna, which replaced Birka, was situated further inland, and was to a greater extent connected with domestic trade and developed under royal regulations.³⁰

6.2.1 *Viking Age Centre at Iru*

The situation on the northern coast of Estonia differed from that in Viking Age Finland. The same hill-forts and settlements that were described in Chapter 5 were still in use there, the most prominent of them Iru in the territory of present-day Tallinn.

The most intensive period in the use of the Iru hill-fort coincided with the eastern trade boom in the Baltic Sea – the 9th–10th centuries. The complex was at its largest, however, during the 9th century, that is, before Scandinavian activity in *Austrvegr* peaked in the 10th century.

The hill-fort and adjacent settlement had been burned down several times, perhaps due to military attacks. A fire in the 0.4-ha southern plateau of the hill-fort around 850 AD was followed by the whole site being rebuilt, with stronger fortifications in the form of earthen walls and wooden fences. This fortified site burned again around 900, and was then abandoned. From now on, until approximately 1000 AD, only the northern plateau, about a quarter of the size of the southern one, was in use.

²⁸ Talvio 2002: 91–97.

²⁹ Jansson 1997, 2000; Nosov 2001.

³⁰ See also e.g. Sawyer 1982: 130.

Most archaeological excavations on the northern plateau concentrated on its fortifications, and much less is known about the occupation layer inside the 10th-century hill-fort. It is possible that this hill-fort was also destroyed at least once during its 100-year existence. In any case, the fortifications were partly re-built in stone. These stone walls, laid without mortar, seem to resemble, according to available information, the walls erected in the Ljubscha hill-fort in the vicinity of Staraya Ladoga, where they have been dated to the mid-9th century.³¹ The site inhabited during the whole Viking Age was the settlement adjacent to the northern plateau at Iru.³²

The complex of Iru was abandoned at the beginning of the 11th century when, according to widespread opinion in Estonian archaeology, a new centre appeared at the site of medieval Tallinn. Although some researchers have tried to dispute the date when Iru was abandoned,³³ it seems certain however that, even if some activity took place on the hill-fort after the turn of the millennium, it must have been very modest compared with the earlier use of the site.³⁴ During the following years, 11th–12th centuries and later, people lived in a settlement a few hundred metres outside the Iru complex, where an agrarian village is known throughout history.³⁵

The longest-lasting excavations at the Iru complex were carried out in the second half of the 1930s and in the 1950s, when more efficient equipment for archaeological excavations, e.g. sieves, were little used. Fortifications and the adjacent settlement were studied in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the presumably poor methods, the find material gained from Iru is abundant, especially ceramics (Figure 6.1.).³⁶ Most of the finds belong to local or internationally widespread artefact types, but some items relating to the trade route along the north Estonian coast can also be pointed out, among them some probably Scandinavian artefacts (e.g. a symmetrical brooch, bone pins, a comb) or items originating in the eastern areas (e.g. some glass-beads, two 10th-century dirhams). Several finds resemble artefacts known from Finland. Quite a number of arrow-heads seem to represent central Swedish types, some of them found in the destruction debris of the last hill-fort and dated to around 1000 AD (Figure 6.2.). Still, taking into consideration some recent finds, similar

31 Ryabinin 1999, 2000.

32 For building phases and explanatory argument see Lang 1996: 101–104.

33 Kiudsoo 2014.

34 For discussion see Mägi 2007b, 2015: 95–101.

35 Lang 1996: 34–104.

36 As for find material, the interpretation is completely based on analyses presented in Valter Lang's book 1996: 72–101, 106–117.



FIGURE 6.1 *Fine pottery from the hill-fort of Iru (TLU AI 3428: 993).*
PHOTOGRAPH BY M. MÄGI.



FIGURE 6.2 *Selection of artefacts found from the hill-fort of Iru (TLU AI 3428: 594, 4051: 7, 494, 3429: 583, 4942: 60, 3577: 79, 4051: 642, 560, 4942: 250, 3428: 298, 3429: 361, 4051: 1177, 733, 3429: 260).*
PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.

arrow-heads seem to have been widespread on Saaremaa, and probably also in other areas in coastal Estonia. The Iru finds have never been analysed from a craft point of view, although the number of tool fragments and other items probably linked with craft activities seems to be considerable.

6.2.2 *Viking Age Centre in the Vicinity of Medieval Tallinn?*

The idea that, after the abandonment of Iru, a new centre appeared on the site of the later old town of Tallinn, was first put forward in the late 1930s. In the 1950s, some archaeologists even claimed, although without properly publishing their interpretation, that the earlier settlement was found in excavations at the central market of medieval Tallinn. This interpretation was, however, later convincingly disproved. Despite multiple excavations in the territory of medieval Tallinn, no finds dated to the period before the beginning of the 13th century have come to light.³⁷

Actually, the situation is even more complicated. Contrary to the lack of finds, more than two dozen ¹⁴C analyses pointing mainly to the 11th–12th centuries, but sometimes to the period starting with the 7th century, and in few cases even to earlier times, have been collected from medieval Tallinn during the last decades.³⁸ Since all these analyses are taken from wood, one possible explanation could be the use of old timber when erecting the first houses of the medieval town in the first half of the 13th century. Before the large-scale building works or other activities demanding wood, e.g. heating, timber was probably taken from some place in the vicinity. There were most likely large woods around the later Tallinn that were cut down during the Middle Ages, but that in the early 13th century could still have been available.³⁹ Use of the woods around the new town was presumably preferred to the transportation of old timber from far away; when there were old buildings or other forms of used timber in the vicinity, it can be assumed that this was largely re-used. Another is the situation on Toompea, an impressive 46-m-high limestone cliff next to the old town. There, under the medieval castle, both wood fragments dated by ¹⁴C analysis to the period before 1200 and single artefacts, including ceramics belonging to the same period have been found.⁴⁰

Much less attention has been paid to the results of some excavations some hundred metres outside the site of medieval Tallinn, where both ¹⁴C analyses dated to the period before the 13th century, and intensive culture layers

37 Mäll & Russow 2003.

38 Aus 1996: table A1; Sokolovski & Jaanits 1997; Mäll 2004; Nurk *et al.* 2011.

39 Mägi 2015: 31–45.

40 Aus 1996: 18–21; Tamm 2004.

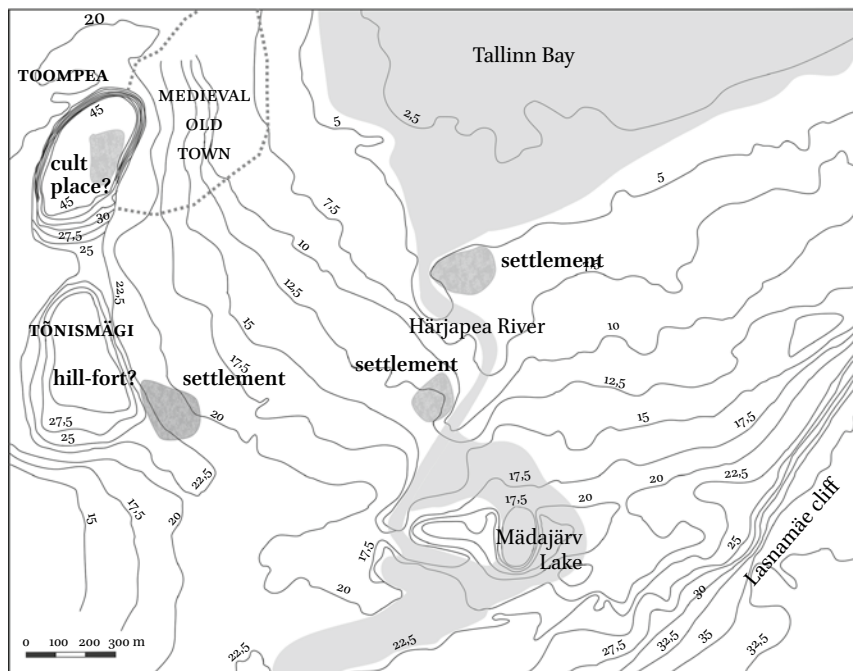


FIGURE 6.3 *Viking Age and 9th–12th-century cultural layers in present-day Tallinn. The coastline and landscapes shown as they might approximately have been in the Viking Age.*

with ceramics from the prehistoric period have been uncovered (Figure 6.3).⁴¹ Based on the *a priori* assumption that the prehistoric hill-fort of Tallinn must have been situated in the same place as the medieval castle, and the settlement next to it, accordingly, on the site of the medieval town, the clear settlement layer outside the medieval walls has been interpreted in Estonian archaeology so far as an “ordinary” agrarian settlement. This opinion has been prevalent even despite the fact that all researchers supporting it also admit that there are no arable lands closer than 4–5 km from medieval Tallinn.

The area where the cultural layer has been detected was on somewhat higher ground on the banks of a small river between a lake and the coast, or a place right next to another hill, smaller and much more suitable for a prehistoric hill-fort. The location was, accordingly, perfect for a Viking Age or earlier harbour site and a possible market place. Still, an intensive culture layer that has so far been recorded in this place has yielded mainly ceramics that can be dated to

41 Aus 1997: 19–20; Karro *et al.* 2011; for an overview of the sites see Mägi 2015: 110–113.

the first half of the Iron Age or earlier.⁴² The district, the present-day city centre of Tallinn, has been mainly densely overbuilt since the 16th century.

It seems logical that the culture layer described above marks a sort of trade centre in Tallinn that, as was common for Viking Age trading harbours, was not located on a straight coast, but in the estuary of a small river, and 0.5 km upstream.⁴³ Toompea, the high limestone cliff with nearly vertical walls on three sides, was and still is extraordinarily dominant in the terrain, and unique on the whole eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. As for its appearance and perhaps also its function, Toompea resembles the Vendic shrine Arkona on the Island of Rugen.⁴⁴ The sacred significance of Toompea can be put forward as one interpretation for its function as well.

Toompea was linked by a narrow neck of land to another, lower morainic hill, Tõnismägi. About 1/5 of the latter, at least, was carried away at the end of the 17th century, since it was considered a security risk for the city. It can, therefore, only be guessed that the prehistoric Tallinn hill-fort that was mentioned in a chronicle at the beginning of the 13th century, could have been located on Tõnismägi, at the foot of which, as we now know, there was also a settlement.⁴⁵ Other places with a cultural layer were on the banks of the river. The area between the settlements and the later medieval Tallinn was a wetland, probably partly still a small bay in the Viking Age.

Radiocarbon analyses and ceramics from the settlement at the foot of Tõnismägi indicate, accordingly, some form of human activity in the vicinity of medieval Tallinn during a long period from the Bronze Age till the late Iron Age. How large the settlement was and whether it or parts of it were in use in the Viking Age, is still unknown due to the limited size of excavations and the extensive building activity on the site in later periods. It is still obvious that topographically the site was most suitable as a nodal point in a long-distance communication route. The best crossing point over the Gulf of Finland at Tallinn Bay favoured the landing of vessels there. In addition, the place was well suited to be the “topographic corridor” indicated by Søren Sindbæk – it was the turning point between the complicated Finnish archipelago with its small rocky islands, and indented north Estonian coastal waters with numerous shallows. These markedly different coastal zones definitely demanded different sailing skills.

42 Bernotas *et al.* 2017.

43 For more detailed discussion Mägi 2015: 61–70.

44 Tummuscheit 2006.

45 Karro *et al.* 2011.

The scenario suggested here presupposes the partly contemporary existence of Iru and Tallinn. This is, however, understandable, since the sites most likely belonged to different categories. Iru at the periphery of large arable lands, at the distance of 4–5 km from the sea, was probably a political centre that seasonally functioned as a trade and craft centre. Tallinn, although its size and importance are unknown, was a harbour site where, especially, ships sailing along the big *Austrvegr*-route might have stopped.

The Iru centre covered, in its heyday, the area of the large and naturally well-protected southern plateau. In the 10th century, only the much smaller hill-fort on the northern plateau, together with its adjacent settlement, was used, probably somewhat less intensively than a hundred years earlier. It can be speculated that perhaps it was the decline of the Iru centre at the beginning of the 10th century that caused the move of part of its functions to Tallinn, where some sort of harbour site was probably already present.

6.2.3 *The Surroundings of Tallinn Bay in Written Sources*

Most researchers agree that the German name for Tallinn – *Reval* – comes from an earlier district name that was originally *Rävala* or *Revala*. The latter, in turn, may have survived in the name of a village immediately outside present-day Tallinn – Rebala. Still, one cannot exclude the possibility that *Reval* or, as it appears in Nordic sagas – *Rafala*, was originally a Nordic name, as was the case with several other place names in present-day Estonia (e.g. *Eysýsla*, *Aðalsýsla*, perhaps also *Vírland* and *Estland*).

The idea is supported by the fact that the name *Rafala* or *Reval* seems to refer to the most characteristic feature in the landscape around Tallinn Bay – the cliff. It was an essential landmark for everyone who intended to sail into Tallinn Bay. In Old Danish, the word *reffuel* indicated a cliff along a coast; in Old Swedish, the same thing was called *revel* or *ravel*.⁴⁶ Cliffs can also be found on the coast of eastern Virumaa in north–east Estonia, but there they are not connected with bays suitable for harbour sites.

Rafala was sometimes mentioned in Nordic saga literature, a phenomenon that indicates the prominence of the place (see Section 4.2.6.). In most cases, however, it remains unclear whether only a certain centre or a whole district was mentioned. Sharing the same name was common in sagas, and even as late as in the 13th–14th centuries the name *Reval* was used both for the town and for the district around it, sometimes even for the whole of north Estonia that belonged to Denmark at this time.⁴⁷

46 Nielsen 1966: 310.

47 E. g. Diplomatarium Danicum II.11, nr. 70, year 1333 or III.2, nr. 273, year 1346.

Rafala, the district or the trading place, was mentioned in the *Saga of Burnt Njal*. Two Vikings, Gunnar and Hallvadr, visited the place at some time in the 970s:⁴⁸

Thence they [Gunnar and Hallvadr] held on south towards Denmark, and thence east to Smoland and had victory wherever they went. They did not come back in the autumn. The next summer they held on to *Rafala*, and fell in there with sea-rovers, and fought at once, and won the fight. After that they steered east to *Eysýsla*, and lay there somewhere under a ness...

The remark that one can sail eastwards from *Rafala* and reach Saaremaa (*Eysýsla*) is somewhat contradictory to geographical circumstances, but such mistakes are common in saga literature. Looking from Iceland, where the story was written down in early Middle Ages, both *Rafala* and *Eysýsla* were some vaguely known places in the east.

A district called *Rafalandi* appears in legendary sagas describing historically imprecise and often fabulous adventures that frequently took place in *Austrvegr*. *Rafalandi* was mentioned, for instance, among the lands that offered military help to the king of *Aldeigjuborg* (Staraya Ladoga) (see in more detail Section 4.2.6.). The assistance was offered by “...*Kirjálalandi* [Karelia] and *Rafestalandi* [Tavastland or Häme in present-day Finland?], *Refalandi*, *Vírlandi*, *Eistlandi*, *Líflandi*, *Vitlandi* [a district in later Prussia?], *Kúrlandi*, *Lánlandi*...”.⁴⁹ Although the list of “countries” was compiled around the 14th century and could, therefore, just be a register of areas known somewhere in the east by the story-teller, the mentioning of *Rafala* might be pointed out. The place or district that geographically covered a comparatively small area, was obviously relevant enough to be mentioned individually. It is also noteworthy how many district-names represented the north Estonian coast, compared with surrounding areas. It was hardly a coincidence, but most probably reflected the preferences of Viking Age *Austrvegr*-communication.

6.2.4 *Hill-Forts and Settlements in the Rest of the North Estonian Coast*

On the northern coast of Estonia, complexes consisting of hill-forts and settlements, most of them arising in the previous centuries, gained momentum (Figure 6.4.). The most remarkable or, at least, one of the best investigated was

48 The Story of Burnt Njal, 30.

49 The Saga of Halfdan, 24.



FIGURE 6.4 *Gulf of Finland in the Viking Age. Hill-forts and other centres up to 1000 AD and internationally most intensively used communication route. Drawn after present-day map.*

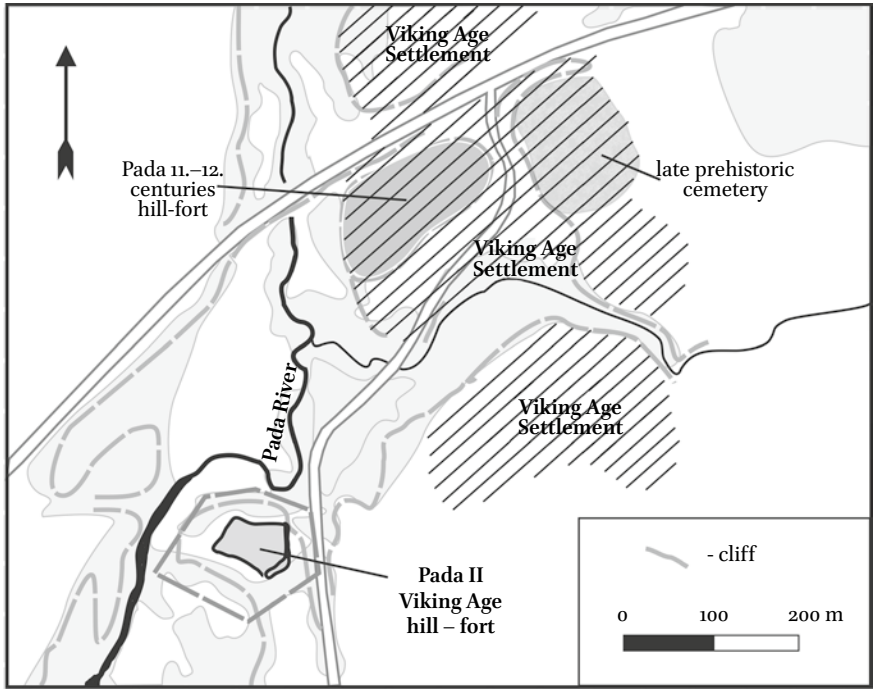


FIGURE 6.5 *The complex of Pada hill-forts, settlements, and late prehistoric cemetery.*

Pada in north-east Estonia (Pada II; Figure 6.5.). The Viking Age hill-fort was situated on the steep bank of the small Pada River, at a distance of slightly more than 10 km from the coast at this time. As for the location, the Pada hill-fort resembled that of Iru, especially because it was a naturally well-protected



FIGURE 6.6 *Stone wall at Pada II Viking Age hill-fort (TLU AI 1-103-39-025).*
 PHOTOGRAPH BY T. TAMLA. COURTESY OF ARCHIVE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL
 RESEARCH COLLECTIONS, TALLINN UNIVERSITY.

place in the bend of a river. Another similarity with the Iru complex was a large settlement site with an area of approximately 4–5 hectares at a distance of 150–200 m from the Pada hill-fort. As at the hill-fort, there have been archaeological excavations at the settlement.

The area within the Pada II hill-fort was 0.75 ha, and the site was protected with an earthen wall only from one side, that which lacked naturally steep slopes (Figure 6.6.). The wall was partly laid as a dry-stone wall consisting of limestone. The wall was additionally defended by a 2-m-broad and 1-m-deep moat. In addition to the other similarities with the Iru complex, Pada II was also abandoned around 1000 AD.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the similarities between these two complexes end there. The Pada complex was situated further away from the coast than Iru, close to the inland border of the surrounding cluster of arable lands. The topography of Pada seems to indicate, therefore, the preliminary function of the hill-fort as a political centre. Regional trade that was most likely connected with the hill-fort-settlement complex was patterned by the combination of water and winter routes. At a distance of about 2 km from the Pada complex vast wetland zones

⁵⁰ Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 228–229.

began, reaching as far as Lake Peipus in the south-east, and to the northern Tartu district in the south. These wetlands, rivers, and lakes formed ideal landscapes for winter transport, and probably functioned as one of the most suitable routes connecting central Estonia with the north Estonian coast. Those who had arrived in Pada over the frozen wetlands must have stayed there for a while in the hill-fort or in the adjacent settlement, waiting for spring weather and the possibility of sailing along the Pada River to the sea.

Another contemporary and similar complex, situated in Koila, 4 km north of Pada, indirectly indicates that the Pada complex was predominantly connected with inland trade. The Koila hill-fort, with an area of 0.4 ha, had been used in earlier periods but defended further in the middle of the 1st millennium AD. Koila was situated about 8 km from the coast, a location that resembled that of Iru more than Pada. Still, the Koila hill-fort had been built right in the middle of arable lands and not in some place that was as close as possible to the sea, which suggests that the site was a political centre predominantly connected with local and regional trade. Like most of such hill-forts, Koila was also abandoned around 1000 AD.⁵¹

Purtse Tarakallas, less than 20 km to the east of the others, seems to be much more directly connected with sea-trade. The hill-fort was situated slightly more than 3 km upstream on the Purtse River (Figure 6.7.). As a matter of fact, Purtse also constituted a whole complex.⁵² In addition to the Purtse Tarakallas hill-fort, another hill-fort, smaller and with weaker fortifications, is known in the estuary of the river, at a distance of only 250 m from the sea. This hill-fort, called Purtse Taramägi, has unfortunately not been archaeologically investigated, and its period of active usage is unknown. The Tarakallas hill-fort is dated to a comparatively long period from the Viking Age till the beginning of the Middle Ages. On the opposite side of the river, quite a large settlement site has been recorded.

Although there have been archaeological excavations at the Purtse Tarakallas hill-fort, the digs were focused on the fortifications, which had been built partly of stone. Still, a number of finds gained in the course of these excavations resembled those from Iru. Unlike the majority of Viking Age north Estonian hill-forts, Purtse Tarakallas was not abandoned around 1000 AD, but instead rebuilt with clearly stronger fortifications. This later hill-fort was used up to the 13th–14th centuries.

The Purtse hill-forts and settlement were located in surroundings that topographically were perfectly suited for a Viking Age harbour-site. Vast arable

51 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 224–225.

52 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 230–232.



FIGURE 6.7 *Purtse Tarakallas hill-fort in late 1930s. Photographer unknown.*
COURTESY OF ARCHIVE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH COLLECTIONS,
TALLINN UNIVERSITY.

lands spread out from the vicinity, the most complex and fertile in north-east Estonia, where a great number of archaeological sites are recorded and partly excavated. These lands reached very close to the coast. At the same time, the coast of this part of north-east Estonia consists of limestone cliffs, where few places were suitable as actual harbours. One of the places where the cliff is interrupted is the estuary of the Purtse River. It can be estimated that this place was the most suitable natural harbour in the whole of north-east Estonia, where most cargo ships sailing along the Estonian coast presumably stopped. The weaker fortification – Taramägi – near the coast functioned predominantly for ships sailing by and landing only briefly, while the more relevant trading place was most probably situated near the Tarakallas hill-fort, most likely at the settlement there.

Another complex of two hill-forts, resembling the others in terms of the paucity of the digs, was situated in the lower reaches of the Toolse River. Toolse hill-fort, whose date is unknown, is on the riverbank 500 m from the sea. Another hill-fort, Toolse Ussimägi, was situated about 2 km upstream. The latter has been excavated and dated to the second half of the 1st millennium AD; it was most probably abandoned around 1000 AD. The Toolse Ussimägi hill-fort

was comparatively small, situated in a U-shaped river bend with steep slopes and fortified at one end by an artificial wall. A settlement layer was detected at the foot of the hill-fort but its date is unspecified.⁵³

Some finds, as well as a ¹⁴C analysis, suggest that a Viking Age complex consisting of a hill-fort and an adjacent settlement probably also existed in the present-day city of Narva, in the estuary of the Narva River between the sea and Lake Peipus. However, this area was unfortunately completely destroyed by later building works.⁵⁴

6.2.5 *Estonian Northern Coast in Saxo's Mythological Stories?*

As for the north Estonian coast, some Nordic sagas transmitted to us by Saxo Grammaticus in the legendary part of his book can possibly be cited here. Saxo's place names were translated into Latin and presumably adjusted with the author's own knowledge of the areas far in the east. The places that were originally labelled as *Garðaríki* or *Austrvegr*, probably appeared in Saxo's book as *Ruthenia* (Russia; see Section 4.2.4.).

According to one of these stories, the mythological King Frotho of Denmark, after he had attacked Couronia, met in the open sea a *Ruthenian* chieftain named Tranno. Considering what was "Russia" in Saxo's time it is, however, plausible to believe that Tranno did not come from some Kiev-Rus inland town, but originated, in the original story, from *Garðaríki* or *Austrvegr*. He might have been some random eastern Viking residing in Staraya Ladoga, or perhaps a chieftain from the coasts of present-day Estonia or Latvia. They had a battle which ended with Tranno's promise to pay tribute to Frotho. He never did so, however, causing Frotho to turn back to *Ruthenia* and start to attack "towns" or hill-forts there.⁵⁵ These "towns of *Ruthenia*" could not have been Kiev-Rus centres, most of them deep inland, even though Saxo called one of them *Paltisca*, which seems to have derived from Old-Norse *Palteskja* (Polotsk). It is possible that the original story, used by Saxo, contained some other name resembling *Palteskja*, and was therefore translated by Saxo as *Paltisca* – because at the end of the 12th century there was known a town and principedom with that name somewhere in an undefined east. It is also clear that the hill-forts had to have been situated near the coast, where the mythological king, in the original narratives probably just some Viking chieftain adventuring in *Austrvegr*, could

53 Tönnisson *et al.* 2008: 222–224.

54 Tönnisson *et al.* 2008: 235–236.

55 Saxo Grammaticus, 2.1.4–6.

easily reach with his ships. There were no such hill-forts on the then sparsely inhabited coast of what is now present-day north–west Russia (see Figure 6.4.).

But when he [Frotho] learnt that the envoys he had dispatched to *Ruscia* to demand tributes had been savagely murdered by the treacherous inhabitants, in anger he followed up this twofold wrong by putting the city of *Rotala* under very tight siege. Lest its capture be retarded by the intervening river, he channelled the total volume of water into a number of fresh courses, and where there had been a bed of unmeasured depth made passable fords; he only stopped when its rapid flood had been diminished through drawing it off into the various runnels so that it propelled its streams in a gentler flow, hemming it into winding conduits which gradually thinned into shallows. When the river had thus been brought under control, the town, deprived of its natural defence, fell before the unobstructed incursion of his troops.

This task accomplished, he conveyed his army to the city of *Paltisca*. Since he believed it was invincible by force, he exchanged warfare for deception. Letting only a very few individuals into the secret, he found a dark, hidden retreat and, to assuage the enemy's apprehension, had it publicly proclaimed that he was dead. In order to gain verisimilitude they celebrated his funeral and erected a barrow. His soldiers, who were now made party to the ruse, mourned as they attended their leader's supposed last rites. Hearing the report, the city's ruler, *Vespasius*, thought the war as good as won; consequently he kept such slack, negligent guard that his adversaries were given the chance to break in and he was slaughtered amid his games and relaxations.⁵⁶

After having subjugated *Rotala* and *Paltisca*, Frotho attacked *Hellespont* again, conquering there another hill-fort (see further in the text). The name *Hellespont* probably designated the lower reaches of the Daugava River; if *Ruthenia* really here meant Kiev-Rus and *Paltisca* Polotsk, the Vikings had to travel at least 800 km along mostly smaller rivers and watersheds between them, which is very unlikely. Still, assuming that place names in old written sources are often not the same as in original stories, Frotho's adventures can also be considered in a much more realistic way. Saxo's *Ruthenia* was clearly an area with a strong maritime culture, and could therefore hardly have designated only the Russia of Saxo's own time (see Section 4.2.4.).

56 Saxo Grammaticus, 2.1.7.

If something similar to Frotho's adventures really happened and there existed some old narratives of it in Saxo's time, these events probably took place at the beginning or middle of the Viking Age, thus, in the 9th–10th centuries. Assuming that *Rotala* and *Paltisca*, which were situated close to *Hellespont*, were hill-forts somewhere near the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, it appears, quite surprisingly, that there are only a very limited number of candidates. As was demonstrated before, Viking Age hill-forts predominantly existed along the Estonian coast, and even there only in the northern part of the country, or on the island of Saaremaa.⁵⁷ Among them, only some of the larger ones can fit with the narratives.

The description of the taking of *Rotala* is unusual in several respects, although Saxo frequently lets the mythological kings use their cunning when conquering "towns". It is unlikely that the clerk himself understood how and by what methods Frotho actually could lower the water level in the river around the hill-fort. In any case, we can learn from the story that the hill-fort was well-protected by the river, so was presumably located on a river-bend, and that there were no considerable additional fortifications. Both aspects fit well with the Viking Age centre at Iru that, according to archaeological evidence, really has been burnt down several times.

Actually, there may be more evidence for identifying Iru with *Rotala*. The Pirita River, on whose banks the Iru complex is situated, is characterised by numerous small rivulets in the lower reaches, including in the vicinity of the Iru hill-fort. These rivulet-beds are dry most of the year, but sometimes fill up with water. These somewhat unusual rivulets could easily be the subject of the narrative of grandiose drainage-works arranged by Frotho. It is difficult to believe that some Viking army, even when it was more numerous than usual, could in reality carry out drainage-digging works extensive enough to dry out a whole river.

It is even more speculative to define the location for Saxo's *Paltisca*, especially because there are no kind of hints about the surroundings of this hill-fort. It seems to have been situated not so far away from *Rotala*. There are some hill-fort-settlement complexes along the northern and north-western Estonian coast with later names that somewhat resemble *Paltisca* – e.g. Pada or Padise. However, we do not know what these hill-forts were called at the time when they were in use. The name *Rotala*, on the other hand, resembles both *Rafala* and *Rotalia*, the latter indicating west Estonia in the Middle Ages. Toponyms

57 In addition, there was Grobiņa on the Couronian coast that, however, was more likely to have been connected with Frotho's earlier adventures in Couronia (Saxo Grammaticus, 2.1.4–5).

can, however, appear in old documents in unrecognisable forms, and there could have been completely different-sounding parallel names for more relevant places in different languages, making it very complicated to use place names in early written sources as firm arguments.

6.2.6 *Hill-Forts in West Estonia and Estonian Islands*

Almost no 9th–10th-century hill-forts are known from the western part of mainland Estonia. An exception is north–west Estonia and the Padise hill-fort, which has also been excavated on a small scale. Only a few finds were uncovered in these digs but ^{14}C analyses indicated that at least part of some wooden constructions had been erected in the 7th–10th centuries. The hill-fort is comparatively small, and so, too, are the arable lands in its vicinity.⁵⁸ The location of the site has been explained by a probable, but still undiscovered harbour place in the estuary of the Padise River; it is, however, quite possible that Viking Age ships could also sail the river upstream directly to the site of the hill-fort about 4 km from the former coast. Another possibility is that the Padise hill-fort was situated at the crossroads of winter and sea routes, since the vast Middle-Estonian wetlands begin in the area.

Another hill-fort that seems to be connected with wetlands and winter-routes over them is Soontagana in the south-western part of the present-day Estonia. Archaeological excavations there have revealed that the site was most intensively used in the 11th–13th centuries, but some finds, as well as ^{14}C analyses indicate that it had its beginnings as early as the Viking Age, perhaps even before that (see Section 7.2.1. for more detail).

There are two hill-forts on the south-eastern coast of Saaremaa that belong to the 9th–10th centuries and could have been connected with sea transport. The most significant of them is the Pöide hill-fort, which was presumably ruling over a harbour site at Tornimäe just over 6 km away (Figure 6.8.). Both the hill-fort and the harbour site have been excavated and dated to the 8th–10th centuries.⁵⁹ There was probably also a settlement at the foot of the Pöide hill-fort. The hill-fort was abandoned around 1000 AD, but built up again with stronger fortifications in the 12th century.

Close to the Pöide hill-fort there was a lake that has since turned into bog, but which in the Viking Age presumably offered the possibility of sailing along some short rivers, to the sea near the location of the Tornimäe harbour. From the other side, in wintertime the lake and bog offered the possibility of travelling over the frozen land to the inland districts of the big island of Saaremaa.

58 Saadre 1970; Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 194–195.

59 Lõugas & Mägi-Lõugas 1994a; 1994b; Mägi 2005c.



FIGURE 6.8 *Pöide hill-fort in 2012. A picture from the film “Pöide, silent witness” by Fookus Pookus, taken by Pelle Vellevoog.*

The location of the Tornimäe harbour was chosen to allow control over all water-traffic through the Little Strait between two Estonian islands, which was probably an intensively used route when sailing from Gotland towards the Gulf of Finland.

The area of the Tornimäe harbour covered about 3.5 ha; the culture layer detected there was intensive but unfortunately quite disturbed by agriculture and the buildings of a later village. Numerous finds included, in addition to local material, some items from surrounding regions, e.g. Couronia or Semgallia. Remains of probably seasonally used buildings were recorded. There were remains of some craft workshops, including blacksmithery, bone-work, and the manufacture of glass beads; in addition, numerous boat rivets were uncovered.⁶⁰ Use of the Tornimäe site seems to have been the most intensive compared with other excavated prehistoric harbour sites on Saaremaa; even though the find material does not indicate long-distance contacts, the place can, therefore, be considered a central local harbour. Both the location and the vicinity of the best arable lands of Saaremaa made it attractive for passing ships to stop there.

Much less is known of the early-Viking Age hill-fort at Asva in southern Saaremaa, where the culture layer was heavily damaged by later ploughing. The hill-fort was situated only a few hundred metres from the coast of a small bay and was, according to the find material, in use from the 6th till the 9th

60 Mägi 2005c, 2010b.

centuries. The harbour site of the hill-fort has been assumed to lie about 1 km away, in the vicinity of an excavated 11th–12th-century harbour site at Viltina.⁶¹

6.2.7 *Vikings both in Sweden and in the Eastern Coasts of the Baltic?*

Everywhere in the present-day Estonia there can be observed a sudden change in archaeological evidence in the second half of the 10th century: the former meagre find material or almost total lack of graves was replaced by numerous graves with multiple grave goods, although fragmented and badly burnt. Similar changes can be observed among several other Baltic Finnic groups, especially the Livs, Karelians, and inhabitants of northern Couronia, where graves seem to appear only in the final part of the Viking Age. Since the same development characterised most areas inhabited by Baltic Finns, it can be suggested that the changes were, at least partly, caused by alteration in attitudes to the afterlife, which did not include grave goods or even archaeologically traceable graves before the second half of the 10th century, and not by sudden settlement expansion (see also 2.2., 2.3.2., and 2.3.3.).

The quantity of 9th-century or early 10th-century jewellery and weapons found in Estonia is quite modest, thus making it difficult to suggest anything about possible cultural contacts. Still, even within this limited evidence a number of artefact types similar to eastern Scandinavian ones, or artefacts probably imported from Scandinavia, can be distinguished. Fragments of only one Scandinavian oval brooch and one Gotlandic animal-headed brooch are so far known from the area of present-day Estonia. Instead, there is a richly decorated Gotlandic chain-holder known from west Estonia, as well as two round brooches from the northern part of the country (some of the items see Figure 5.5.). Nordic ornament in Borre and Jellinge Style is known from several items, e.g. horse-bits, plaques, and pendants, but quite often also from weapons or other artefacts connected with martial culture.⁶² Indrek Jets has demonstrated that local development of Nordic Animal Style can be followed in the so-called leaf-shaped decoration of triangular-headed dress-pins of mainly the 9th–10th, perhaps the 11th centuries.⁶³ The fairly large ring-headed or triangular-headed dress-pins were widespread in 9th–10th-century coastal Estonia, where they were probably worn by both men and women (Figure 6.9.).⁶⁴

61 Mägi 2009b.

62 Jets 2013: 33–49.

63 Jets 2013: 50–54; Jets & Mägi 2015.

64 Mägi 1997.

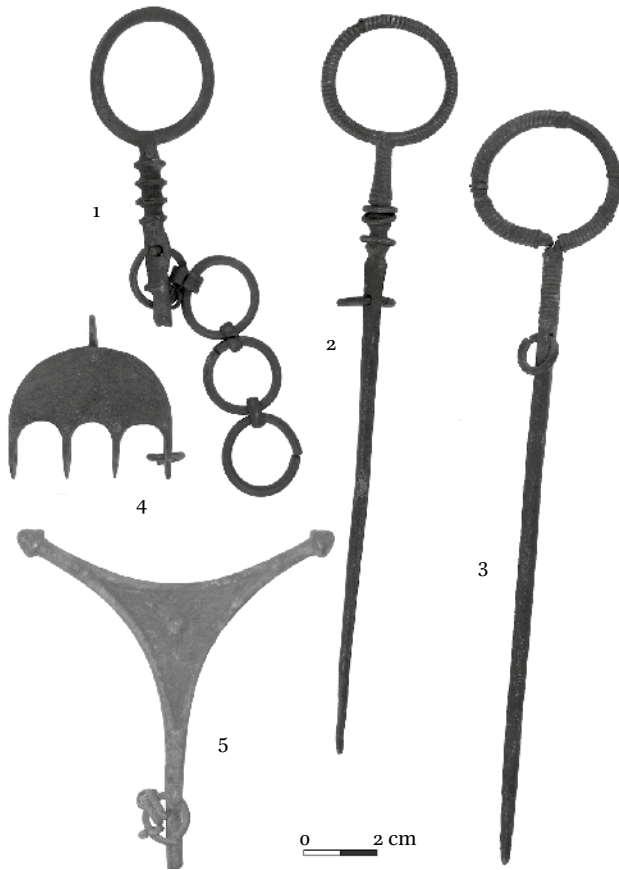


FIGURE 6.9 *Estonian (and Finnish) dress pins from the 9th–10th centuries. 1 – Presti (TLU AI 5490: 386), 2 – Väike-Kalju (TLU AI 3445), 3 – Odalätsi (TLU AI 3822: 303), 4 – Tornimäe (TLU AI K 8: 9), 5 – Kaarma parish (TLU AI K 67: 18). PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.*

As for the 9th–10th-century ornaments, a number of penannular brooches found in present-day Estonia can be mentioned, belonging to the same types that are known in Birka and Gotland, but also in Finland and the Livic area. Some such brooches have been considered Gotlandic, but most of them are certainly local, or at least seem to have been very common in Estonia (Figure 6.10.).⁶⁵ Still, similar penannular brooches, when found in areas outside the northern coastal zone of the Baltic Sea, have frequently been treated as signs of Scandinavian presence in Eastern Europe. It is worth noting that brooches spread in 9th–10th-century coastal Estonia mostly belonged to

65 Mägi-Lõugas 1994a; Jets 2013: 50.



FIGURE 6.10 *Estonian Viking Age jewellery.* 1 – Saaremaa (TLU AI K 83: 22), 2 – Krootuse (TLU AI 2451: 1), 3 – Tornimäe (TLU AI K 8: 8), 4 – Mõisaküla (TLU AI 2602: 8), 5 – Tornimäe (TLU AI K 8: 7), 6, 7 – Laekvere (TLU AI 3778: 2–4), 8 – Saaremaa (TLU AI K 72: 1), 9 – Kurevere (TLU AI K 75: 1), 10 – Karja parish (TLU AI K 77: 6).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.

different types than those widespread in inland parts of the country. This is also true for most other artefact types.

Comparatively few weapons are known from 9th-century or the first half of the 10th century Estonia, and those that exist are recorded mainly in the northern and western parts of the country.⁶⁶ These are items belonging to the same types as weapons in Eastern Scandinavia, e.g. in Birka (Figure 6.11.). Only a few ornamented weapons are known from most of the period but at the end of the 10th century, when artefacts appear in Estonian and Livic graves again,

66 Mägi-Lõugas 1995.



FIGURE 6.11 Selection of Viking Age coastal Estonian weapons. 1–4, 7 – Saaremaa (TLU AI K 85: 115, 2, 37, 1, 120), 5 – Kurevere (TLU AI 4368: 38), 6, 8 – Saaremaa (TLU AI 3822: 424; TLU AI K 88: 143), 9 – Pöide (TLU AI 4460), 10 – Kaarma parish (TLU AI K 67: 29).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.

there are suddenly a number of weapons ornamented in Nordic Animal Styles, too. Most of them, however, cannot be dated more precisely than from the end of the 10th century to the 12th century. These were mainly sword hilts and spearhead sockets covered with a thin layer of silver, engraved with decoration in the Ringerike or (later) Urnes Styles (Figure 6.12.). Research in recent decades has convincingly demonstrated that both in the pattern of welding and variations in decoration, local groups can be distinguished, suggesting that these weapons were produced extensively on the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea, in Estonia, Livonia, and the northern part of Couronia, as well as in Finland.⁶⁷ In coastal Estonia, at least, no other, “more local” weapon types are

67 Creutz 2003: 163ff; Jets 2013.

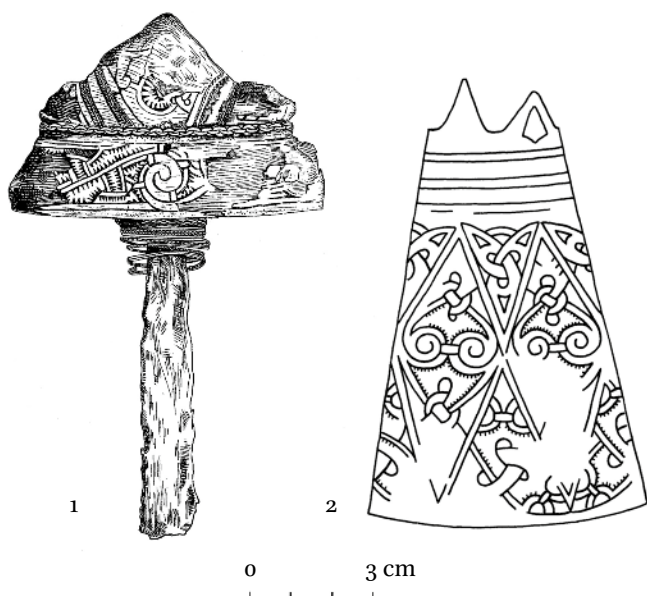


FIGURE 6.12 *Examples of Estonian weapons decorated in Ringerike Style.*
 1 – Liiva-Putla (Saaremaa Museum SM 6048), 2 – Viltina
 (TLU AI 3884: 3905). From: Jets 2013, Figs 33: 1–2, 41: 1.
 DRAWN BY I. JETS.

recorded, as was characteristic for the areas inhabited by ethnic Balts. As for the latter, much more is known of their artefact culture in the 9th–10th centuries because of their burial customs, but only a small part of their artefacts demonstrate similarity with Scandinavia.

Taking into consideration non-military artefacts of Scandinavian types or decorated in Nordic Styles, it is obvious that in the 9th–10th centuries Nordic culture influenced not simply warriors but also the female sphere, although on a smaller scale.⁶⁸ Starting from the end of the 10th century, on the other hand, the Scandinavian impact seems to focus on the martial sphere. The tendency became even clearer in the 11th century, when abundant grave goods were deposited in Estonian burial grounds.

The distribution map of Viking Age artefacts decorated in Nordic styles indicates that they were normally widespread in the same areas that are marked by abundant dirham finds (Figure 6.13.). Weapons and other artefacts decorated in the Urnes Style are not shown on the map, since most of them belong to the following centuries. Several late 10th–early 11th-century decorated artefacts have been found in Livic graves or collective stone graves in Estonia, but quite

68 Jets 2013: 252–255.

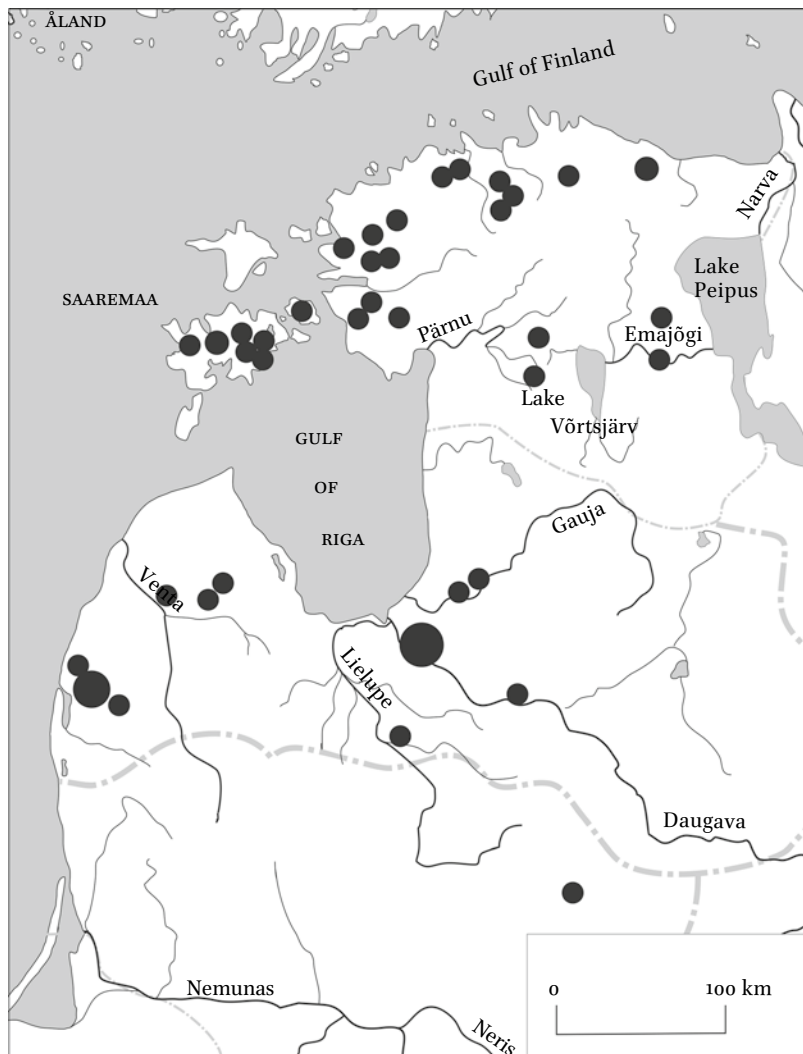


FIGURE 6.13 *Distribution of 9th-10th-century Scandinavian artefacts or artefacts decorated in Mammen or Ringerike style in the Eastern Baltic. Based on Jets 2013: 55–90.*

a number of them are stray finds. Only a small percentage of these finds come from hoards. It is also worth noting that most finds from Couronia shown on the map are dated to the first half of the 9th century.

The distribution of Nordic Animal Styles in the Eastern Baltic marked the areas where we can assume similar approaches and values among warriors, and where we can consider a shared cultural sphere to have existed. As shown in the previous chapters, the common cultural sphere probably involved close

personal contacts, talking each other's languages, and perhaps parallel names among warriors. Some hints at the shared culture can also be found in written sources, e.g. in the *Saga of Burnt Njal* referred to above in connection with a reference to *Rafala*.⁶⁹

After that they [Gunnar and Hallvadr] steered east to *Eysýsla*, and lay there somewhere under a ness. There they saw a man coming down from the ness above them; Gunnar went on shore to meet the man, and they had a talk. Gunnar asked him his name, and he said it was Tofi. Gunnar asked again what he wanted.

"Thee I want to see," says the man. "Two warships lie on the other side under the ness, and I will tell thee who commands them: two brothers are the captains – one's name is Hallgrim, and the other's Kolskegg. I know them to be mighty men of war; and I know too that they have such good weapons that the like are not to be had ... [followed by the description of Hallgrim's and Kolskegg's weapons]" ... Gunnar gave him a golden finger-ring, and went afterwards to his men and told them that war-ships lay on the other side of the ness, "and they know all about us; so let us take to our arms, and busk us well, for now there is gain to be got".

Then they busked them; and just when they were bound they see ships coming up to them. And now a fight sprung up between them, and they fought long, and many men fell ... [followed by the description of a battle that was victorious for Gunnar]

...After that the sea-rovers begged for mercy. Gunnar let them have that choice, and he let them also count the slain, and take the goods which the dead men owned, but he gave the others whom he spared their arms and their clothing, and bade them be off to the lands that fostered them. So they went off and Gunnar took all the goods that were left behind.

Tofi came to Gunnar after the battle, and offered to lead him to that store of goods which the sea-rovers had stowed away, and said that it was both better and larger than that which they had already got. Gunnar said he was willing to go, and so he went ashore, and Tofi before him, to a wood, and Gunnar behind him. They came to a place where a great heap of wood was piled together. Tofi says the goods were under there, then they tossed off the wood, and found under it both gold and silver, clothes and good weapons. They bore those goods to the ships, and Gunnar asks Tofi in what way he wished him to repay him.

69 The Story of Burnt Njal, 30.

Tofi answered, “I am a Dansk man by race, and I wish thou wouldst bring me to my kinsfolk”.

[Gunnar asks why he was there in *Austurvegi*]

“I was taken by sea-rovers”, says Tofi, “and they put me on land here in *Eysýsla*, and here I have been ever since”.

Here, as in several other sagas, Vikings adventuring in *Austrvegr* meet locals who have Old Nordic names and who naturally speak Old Nordic languages. The latter phenomenon merited a special explanation from the story-teller – the man whom the Vikings met, probably a slave, was originally Danish. It makes sense to believe, however, that names and presumably other details in the narrative were actually added later, in order to increase the credibility of the story, especially for 13th-century listeners.⁷⁰ It is most probable that Gunnar and Hallvadr were fighting with local, Saaremaa Vikings, but these men belonged to the same common cultural sphere, used similar weaponry and other attributes, and shared similar attitudes and values.

6.2.8 *Jewellery from Sýslar in Other Countries*

Eastern Baltic artefacts in Scandinavia are normally considered less common than the other way round, which may be because the people who were the main travellers – warriors from the coastal areas around the northern half of the Baltic Sea – often just used artefacts similar in type to those of their colleagues in Sweden. Still, there is one artefact type whose distribution to some extent indicates a different direction of overseas communication. It is a particular type of triangular-headed dress pin, decorated with three leaves. Although the shape of such pins was also widespread in other coastal areas in the Eastern Baltic, the decoration predominantly characterised the Estonian islands and western and north-western parts of the country. This is the common cultural sphere of coastal Estonia that in Scandinavian written sources was frequently mentioned as *Eysýsla* and *Aðalsýsla*, or simply *Sýslar*.

The triangular-headed dress-pins with leaf-shaped decoration were used mainly in the 10th century and the first half of the 11th century.⁷¹ Their specific decoration was influenced by the shared cultural sphere of warriors around the northern part of the Baltic, more precisely by Germanic Animal Art. The earliest examples of such pins, when their decoration still resembled the Animal Art style, date to the 7th–8th centuries (see Section 5.1.3.).⁷² As far as we

⁷⁰ See also Jonuks 2003.

⁷¹ Mägi 2002: 103; Jets & Mägi 2015.

⁷² Jets & Mägi 2015.

know, both men and women decorated themselves with these pins in the 10th–11th centuries. In most cases women used the pins in pairs for attaching chains on their shoulders, while men might have had a single pin fixing their capes.

The distribution of these pins outside coastal Estonia is significant. They have mainly been found in fragments and in trade ports or other centres around the Baltic Sea, for instance the Viking Age trade centre Hedeby, in the Vendic centre Ralswiek in Germany, and in Trelleborg and Roskilde and the landing place at Selsø in Denmark.⁷³ Stray finds also occur in southern Sweden and Gotland, and several items are known from the Livic part of Latvia.⁷⁴ The total number of these finds is probably higher, since only the items that have been published or presented in some exhibition have been shown on the map (Figure 6.14.).

One pin of this type on Gotland, from Västerhejde, although a stray find, may have originally come from a cremation grave; at least it seems to have been in a fire. All other pins of this type on Gotland or southern Scandinavia are fragmentary, often silver items, and found in settlements, hoards, or as stray finds. The ones outside trading places were always in the vicinity of some Viking Age harbour site. Several pins of this type were uncovered in cemeteries on the lower reaches of the Daugava River, where at least some of them probably indicated Saaremaa or coastal Estonian women buried there in late 10th or 11th century (see Section 7.4.3.).

It is interesting to note that although fragments of the coastal Estonian pins are known in southern Scandinavia, not even a single item of this type has been found in inland Estonia. These finds are uncharacteristic of Birka and its surrounding cemeteries, and in Finland only some pins of the very early variant of their ornamental type have been recorded. Their distribution in and around southern Scandinavian harbour sites suggests a somewhat different origin than regular trade. If the fragments were traded by coastal Estonians as silver (or sometimes bronze) then why do we not find them in Middle Sweden or other areas demonstrating a common cultural sphere with the coastal Estonia? Plundering expeditions from Saaremaa and Couronia to southern Scandinavia, which were mentioned in the 11th–12th-century narratives may offer one possible explanation (see in more detail Section 7.1.2.1.), assuming that several warriors who had decorated themselves with such pins also came

73 Jöns 2006; Hildeberg 2009: 101, Fig. 22.

74 Strömberg 1961: 165, Pl. 73;9; Hårdh 1976: Pl. 20:10, 11; Thunmark-Nylén 1983: Fig. 10; Jansson 1995: 88–89, Fig. 8; Mägi 2002: 103; Lamm 2007; Gunnarsson 2013: appendix 2. The author is grateful to Janis Ciglis from the Latvian National Museum for his kind information about such pins found in Latvia.

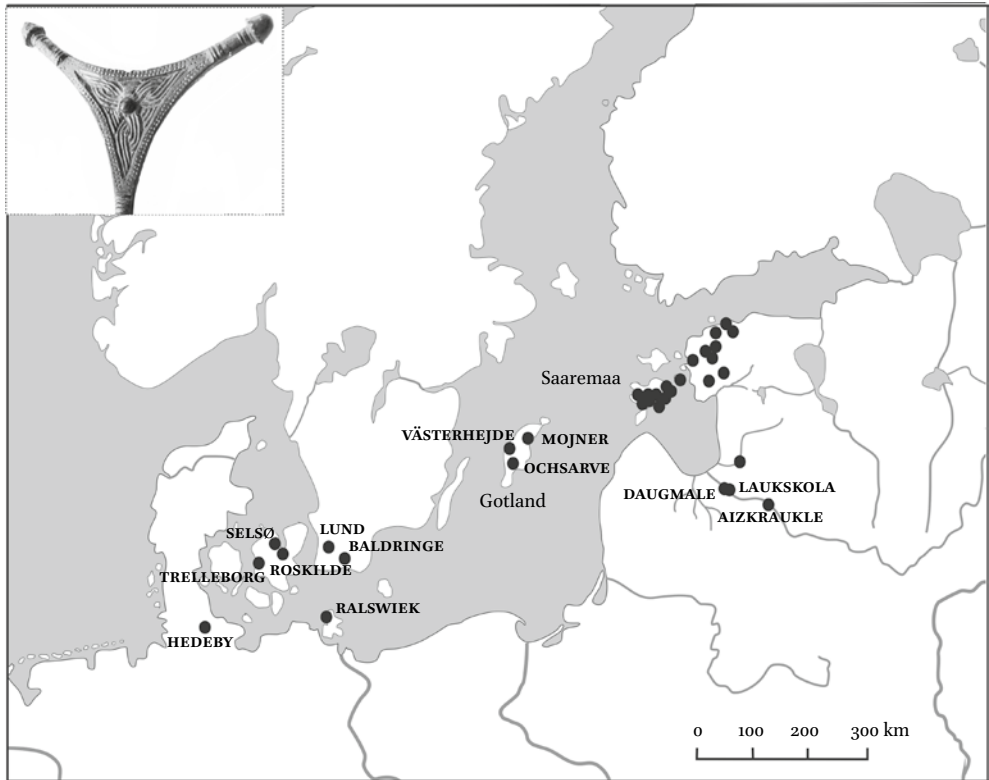


FIGURE 6.14 *Distribution of coastal Estonian triangular-headed pins with leaf decoration, the 9th-early 11th centuries.*

to their deaths during these raids. However, other explanations also remain open, e.g. coastal Estonian traders or mercenaries in early medieval Denmark.

The coastal Estonian triangular-headed pins with leaf-shaped decoration represent one of the most widespread Eastern Baltic artefact types outside the Eastern Baltic itself. Another artefact type that has been abundantly found outside the Eastern Baltic is probably a bracelet of Couronian origin, of which nearly 20 are recorded on Gotland. The quantity of Eastern Baltic artefacts in Scandinavia is probably the highest on Gotland, where more than hundred specific artefacts from the 10th–12th centuries are thought to be of Eastern Baltic origin. This number or, at least, the concentration of these finds is probably much higher than that of specifically Gotlandic artefacts in the Eastern Baltic, where, however, 10th–11th-century international artefact types have quite often been considered “Gotlandic”, especially in older studies. About half the Eastern Baltic finds on Gotland are jewellery types widespread in several, mainly coastal, areas in present-day Estonia and Latvia, while the rest are ethnically more

specific artefacts that can be divided more or less equally between Couronia (or sometimes perhaps Semgallia) and coastal Estonia. Only a very few items from Estonian or Latvian inland districts have found their way to Gotland.⁷⁵

6.2.9 *Adventures of a Norwegian Prince in Estland*

The longest narrative occurring in Viking Age Estonia is certainly the story of Norwegian king-to-be Ólaf Tryggvason, who in 967, when three years old, ended up as a slave in *Estland*. The story is known, with minor variations, from two sources – *Heimskringla* and the *History of Norway*.⁷⁶ The *Heimskringla* version, which is the longer of the two, is given here.⁷⁷

Sigurth was the name of Ástríth's brother, a son of Eirík Bjóthaskalli. He had been abroad a long time, staying in the east with King Valdamar in *Garðaríki*, where Sigurth was held in high esteem. Ástríth was eager to go there to join her brother Sigurth ... She travelled with some merchants ... Ólaf was three years old. And when they sailed east across the Baltic they were attacked by Vikings of *Estland*. They captured both men and goods, killing some and dividing others among them as thralls. There, Ólaf was separated from his mother, and Klerkón, from *Estland*, got him as his share, together with Thórólf and Thorgíls. Klerkón thought Thórólf too old to be a thrall, nor able to do slave work, and killed him; but the boys he took with him and sold them to a man called Klerk, in exchange for a good goat. Still a third man bought Ólaf, purchasing him for a good cloak or garment. His name was Réás, his wife's Rékón, and their son's Rékóni. Ólaf was there for a long time and treated well as the farmer loved him greatly. Ólaf stayed six years in *Estland* as an exile.

Sigurth Eiríksson came to Estland, being sent there by King Valdamar of *Hólmgarðr* to fetch from that land the tribute due to the king. Sigurth travelled in great state, accompanied by many men and with much money. In the market place he saw a boy of great beauty, and surmised that he probably was a foreigner there, and asked him about his name and kin. He gave his name as Ólaf, and said his father was Tryggvi Ólafsson, and his mother, Ástríth, daughter of Eirík Bjóthaskalli. Than Sigurth understood that the boy was his sister's son. He asked the boy how he had got there, and Ólaf told him all that happened to him. Sigurth asked him to come with him to farmer Réás' place. And when he arrived there he bought both

75 Gunnarsson 2013.

76 The Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason, 5–7; A History of Norway, 19.

77 The Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason, 5–7.

boys, Ólaf and Thorgíls, and took them with him to *Hólmgarðr*, without letting it be known of what kin Ólaf was, and maintained him well.

One day Ólaf Tryggvason was standing in the market place, where there was a great multitude. He recognized Klerkón there, the man who had killed his foster father, Thórolf Lousebeard. Ólaf had a small axe in his hand and struck Klerkón's head with it so that it sank into his brain, and ran home at once to his quarters and told his kinsman Sigurth about it. Sigurth took Ólaf speedily to the residence of the queen and told her what had occurred ... Sigurth asked her to help the boy ... There was such excellent protection by law in *Hólmgarðr* that anyone who killed a person who had not forfeited his life, also should lose his. So according to their custom and laws all the populace rushed to find what had become of the boy ... [the king approached with his guard, but finally] ... He adjudged fines which the queen then paid.

The *History of Norway* added that the Vikings attacked Ástríth and Ólaf's ship near *Eysýsla*, that is, the island of Saaremaa.⁷⁸ Some scholars have, however, put forward a suggestion that the Estonian Vikings mentioned in the story might have actually been some Old-Prussian-speaking people instead, because the names given in the saga resemble Lithuanian.⁷⁹ Still, the names of locals seem to have been constructed, perhaps only in the late 12th century when the story was written down,⁸⁰ and the whole narrative is much better suited topographically to present-day Estonia than some southern district in the Eastern Baltic.

As in several other sagas, *Estland* appears in the story as an organic part of the story-teller's world, where everything seems to be arranged more or less in the same way as in Sweden, Norway, or *Garðaríki*. On the other hand, *Estland* and *Garðaríki* are clearly distinguished here – which was also true for the situation at the end of the 10th century, but especially for the late 12th century, when the saga was written down. The events described in the *Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason* took place at a time when the credibility of the kings' sagas abruptly increases and details given in these narratives can often be tested in other sources. There is no doubt that Ólaf Tryggvason was a historical person, who was a child in the 960s; lots of sources also talk of Prince Vladimir (or King Valdemar) in Kiev-Rus. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the prince already resided in Novgorod in the 970s – a centre formed in Novgorod only at the end of the century, even though some activity might have taken place

78 A History of Norway, 19.

79 Palmaru 1980; Tarvel 1994.

80 Joonuks 2003.

there even earlier. King Valdemar, his queen, and court most plausibly lived in Ryurik's Gorodishche, where there was also an adjacent settlement, but their residence was called Novgorod more than 200 years later by the story-teller, who was only aware of the place called Novgorod.

The *Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason* also offers several presumably true details about Estonia in the second half of the 10th century. *Estland* appears in the story as a link in trade between Scandinavia and the Kiev-Rus princedoms. Estonians act as Vikings and as merchants, they hijack ships, and trade in the Novgorodian market. The description of Klerkón's murder leaves no doubt that he was important and a well-known person in the trading place. Although Snorri has described Ólaf's owner Réás as a "peasant", we can assume that the man was actually a wealthy land-owner who lived in some farm in the vicinity of the trading place. To call someone a "farmer" in saga literature was not intended as patronisingly as in later documents.

It is interesting to note that, again, Scandinavians and the inhabitants of *Estland* seem not to have had language problems. The shared cultural sphere suggests that people probably spoke each other's languages, or, what was probably most common, Old Norse was often spoken in the area of present-day Estonia and Finland. The story also lets us assume that at least some Vikings residing in 10th-century north-western Russia could also speak Baltic Finnic languages, which at this time were still spoken by most inhabitants of these areas. In any case, nine-year-old Ólaf, who had spent most of his life as a slave in Estonia, could hardly have spoken languages other than Estonian to communicate with his uncle.

The story mentions markets in Estonia, where, among other merchandise, slaves were sold. The markets were visited by foreign merchants, in this case Norwegian. This is particularly emphasised in the later part of the saga where Ólaf's mother Ástríth, too, was finally liberated after nine years' captivity.⁸¹

There was a man called Lothin. He was from Vík, and both rich and well born. Often he went on trading journeys, and sometimes, on Viking expeditions. One summer Lothin went on a trading journey in the Baltic with only one ship, laden with much merchandise. He sailed to *Estland* and there attended markets during the summer. And when there was a market, all kinds of wares were brought there, and many bondwomen were there for sale. Lothin saw a woman there who had been sold as a slave. And when he looked at the woman he recognized her and knew her to be Ástríth, the daughter of Eirík, who had been King Tryggvi's wife, though

81 The Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason, 52.

she looked different from what she had done when last he saw her. She was pale and peaked and poorly clad. He went up to her and asked how matters stood with her. She replied, "It is bitter to tell you about it. I am sold as a slave, and brought here to be sold". Then they recognized each other, and Ástríth knew him well. Then she begged him to buy her and take her home with him to her kinsfolk. "I shall do so under one condition", he said. "I shall take you to Norway if you will marry me". ... Thereupon Lothin bought Ástríth and took her home to Norway with him and married her there with the consent of her kinsmen.

The place in Estonia where Lothin arrived for trading was most likely situated somewhere near the coast, since the man sailed there with his ship. According to the archaeological data of 10th-century hill-forts and settlements, as was demonstrated before, only some particular places along the north Estonian or Saaremaa coast can be considered here, first of all Purtse in the north-eastern part of the country, Iru/Rafala at the Bay of Tallinn., or Pöide/Tornimäe in Saaremaa

Most interesting is the fact given in the saga that Prince Vladimir sent, in the middle of the 970s, the Norwegian Viking Sigurth with numerous retainers to collect taxes in *Estland*. The market where he arrived was also likely to have been situated somewhere on the coast, or perhaps in some other easily accessible place, for instance in Tartu.

6.2.10 *Inland Estonian Hill-Forts and Settlements*

There were quite a large number of 9th–10th hill-forts and adjacent settlements along the communication route through central Estonian rivers and wetlands, especially in inland Estonia (Figure 6.15).⁸² Most of these hill-forts were comparatively small and, although they nearly always seem to have been linked with local and regional trade routes, it is hard to see most of them as topographically suitable to have been internationally relevant trading centres. Archaeological excavations at several of them have, however, also revealed artefacts that are normally connected with trade, for instance coins. The fact that a great number of them were abandoned around 1000 AD seems to suggest some connection with the boom in the eastern trade as well.

The best example of such Viking Age hill-fort/settlement complexes in inland Estonia is Rõuge, which has been extensively excavated (Figure 6.16). Although these excavations were carried out in the 1950s using contemporary methods, 17 dirhams have been found in the hill-fort and settlement together. The great number of beaver bones has inspired some Estonian archaeologists

82 Tvauri 2012: 321–325.

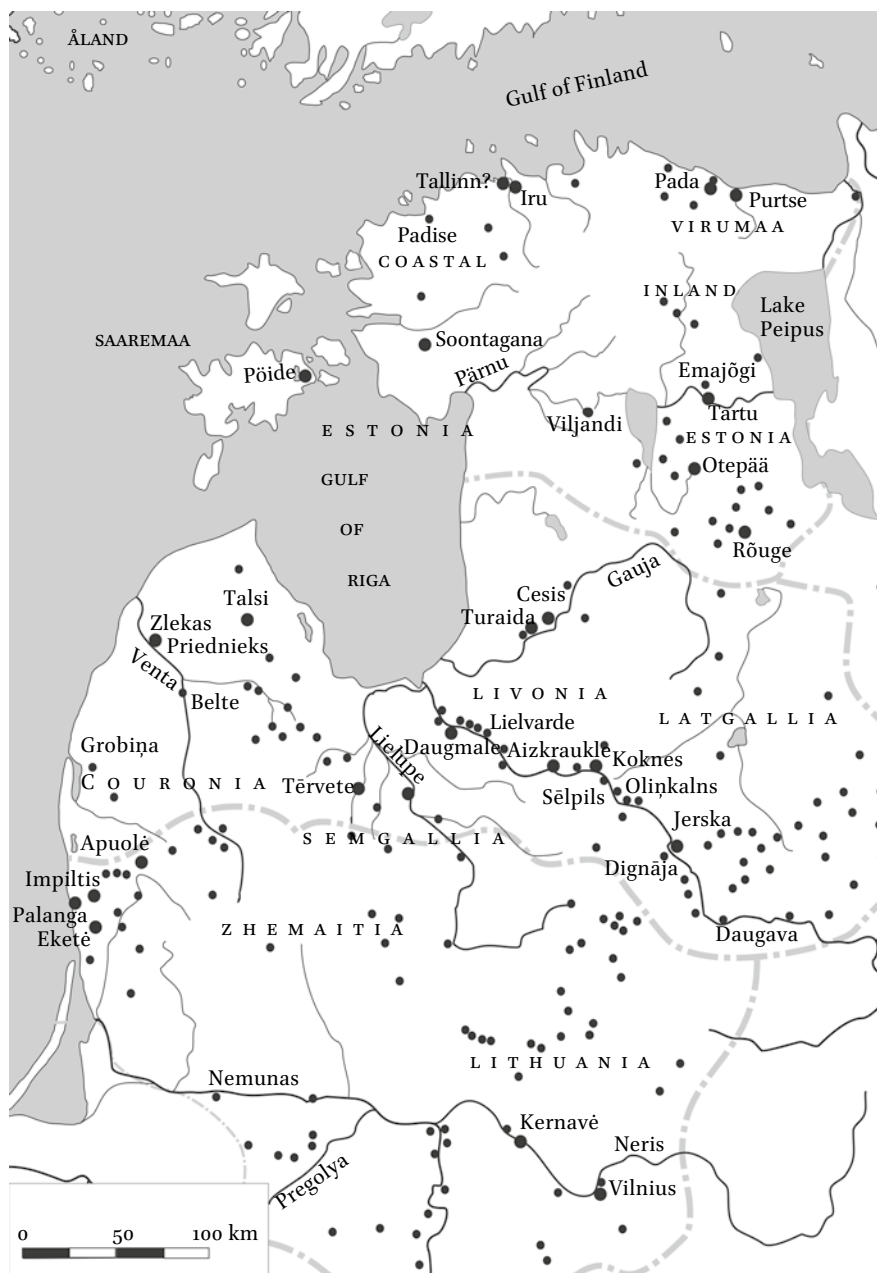


FIGURE 6.15 *Hill-forts in the second half of the 9th- to 10th-century Eastern Baltic. Only archaeologically dated sites are shown. The map is mainly based on: Apals et al. 1974: Fig. 59; Apals & Mugurēvičs 2001: 378–413; Zabiela 2003; Tõnisson et al. 2008.*



FIGURE 6.16 Selection of finds from Rôuge hill-fort (TLU AI 4040: 259, 4805, 759, 3153, 3264, 91, 37, 220, 3384, 4563, 4695, 198, 3162, 231, 5242, 1030, 4586).
PHOTOGRAPHS BY V. KOBRUSEPP.

to interpret Rôuge as a place where beaver-skins were collected to be traded further along the Eastern Way.⁸³ The abandonment of the complex was caused, according to this quite plausible theory, by the end of the boom in the eastern trade, or more precisely the cessation of demand for beaver-skins. An abundance of beaver bones has also been recorded in present-day north-west Russian centres, for instance in Izborsk, Staraya Ladoga, and Pskov, but also in Krutik on the banks of Lake Belye, thus in other trading places belonging to the same Viking Age cultural sphere, at least according to somewhat similar

83 Leimus & Kiudsoo 2004.

archaeological evidence. Beaver has been mentioned as an essential commodity from the North in several Arabic written sources.⁸⁴

The biggest and most influential centre connected with communication routes in inland Estonia was certainly Tartu in the middle reaches of the Emajõgi River. The river is fully navigable and connected inland Estonia with north–west Russian centres, especially Pskov. Tartu was, along Lake Peipus and the short Narva River, easily accessible from the Gulf of Finland as well. The district around Tartu is characterised by abundant finds of silver, including hoards consisting of dirhams. In the vicinity of Lake Peipus in the same district, the earliest luxurious Byzantine artefacts in Estonia – two silver bowls from the 5th century – have come to light.⁸⁵

Vilma Trummal has suggested that the first hill-fort was erected in Tartu in the 5th–6th centuries, while the 7th–11th-century fortifications mark the second habitation phase of the place.⁸⁶ Andres Tvauri argues, however, that the hill-fort did not exist before the 8th century. Like most Estonian archaeologists, he sees the appearance of the complex consisting of the hill-fort with adjacent settlement as the result of some less well-defined social processes.⁸⁷ Prehistoric archaeological evidence at the hill-fort and settlement of Tartu, as much as has survived under the later city, indicates closer contacts with other contemporary hill-forts and settlements in Eastern Estonia, as well as in present-day north–west Russia.⁸⁸ Approximately at the same time the population had begun to grow in Izborsk and Pskov, where the find material much resembles that of Tartu.⁸⁹ The material from all these sites is, at the same time, different from what is known from hill-forts and settlements in coastal Estonia. The number of finds in Tartu that can be connected with the Scandinavian cultural sphere is small, and even these perhaps originate from present-day north–west Russia.⁹⁰

Most prehistoric finds in Tartu come from layers that have been mixed by later building activities. Still, the number of finds connected with crafts is remarkable, compared to other Estonian Viking Age hill-forts or settlements, and this has inspired Tvauri to interpret the place as a relevant crafts centre. Arguing that the number of trade-associated finds – weights, scales, and coins – is

84 Leimus & Kiudsoo 2004 and references.

85 Quast & Tamla 2010.

86 Trummal 1980.

87 Tvauri 2001: 245–246.

88 See also Kiudsoo 2013.

89 Belezki 1996; Sedov 2007.

90 Tvauri 2001: 173–175.

small, he, on the other hand, refuses to consider Tartu a trading place. According to Tvauri, trade was represented in Tartu mainly in the form of buying the raw materials necessary for craft work; what was done with the products was not analysed.⁹¹

Earlier researchers normally considered Tartu to be inland Estonia's most important prehistoric centre for trade and craft workshops.⁹² Tvauri's interpretation of the site was, however, based on the assumption that trade did not play a relevant role in Iron Age Estonia. Why this should be the case was not further argued, although all the following discussion was based on this *a priori* point of view. The lack of international trade also seems to have been the main argument why Tvauri did not believe in the trade route through central Estonian rivers and wetlands, and considered Tartu as the usual residence of one or several chieftains (for further discussion of the matter see Section 3.4.2.). Numerous silver hoards were not treated as signs of trade by him; instead he argued that these only indicated war activities and higher mortality in some areas.⁹³

Nevertheless, the points of view of the earlier archaeologists dealing with Tartu seem to be more logical for several reasons. The topographic location and find material of the Tartu complex seem to support the interpretation of the site as not only a crafts centre but also a mercantile centre. The hill-fort of Tartu was built at one end of a bigger hill and probably covered an area of 0.5–0.6 ha; the area of the Viking Age settlement at the foot of the hill might have been about 2 ha.⁹⁴ About ten silver hoards consisting only of dirhams around this centre and one 10th-century hoard next to the Tartu hill-fort can more likely be considered results of trade activities.⁹⁵ The hoards have been found in arable lands close to smaller rivers flowing to Lake Peipus.⁹⁶ It seems likely that the owners of this silver were also the ones who were active in the trade centre of Tartu. Similarly with north Estonia, only a few 9th–10th-century graves have been recorded in the surroundings of Tartu, except in the final part of the 10th century.

The centre of Tartu probably had closest contacts with other Viking Age centres in present-day north–west Russia, indicated by partly similar archaeological evidence. Still, the importance of Tartu in respect to communication routes through central Estonia cannot be overestimated either. These connections are

91 Tvauri 2001: 185–194.

92 Trummal 1980; for an overview of earlier interpretations see also Tvauri 2001: 22–27.

93 Tvauri 2001: 203–208.

94 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 300–302; Tvauri 2001: 246.

95 For the dirham hoards see Tvauri 2001: 200–202; Kiudsoo 2007.

96 Kiudsoo 2013.

indicated by several dirham finds along the western part of this route (see Section 6.3.1.).

Otepää and Viljandi can be mentioned as other Viking Age hill-forts in inland Estonia. Like Tartu, both of them remained in use even after 1000 AD. Both of these sites have been excavated, but both have been overbuilt by medieval and later towns. Next to the Otepää hill-fort, a 9th–10th-century settlement has also been detected.⁹⁷

6.2.11 *Tableware Mirroring Cultural Contacts*

Common cultural spheres around the northern half of the Baltic Sea were also reflected in ceramics. Some of the highest quality tableware produced inside the common cultural sphere was so-called Baltic Finnish pottery: small and thin-walled, often carinated bowls, frequently decorated with lines, zigzags, or some other modest patterns.

The thinner and more decorated variant, normally called Iru-type pottery,⁹⁸ dominated in west and north Estonia, on the islands of Saaremaa and in south–west Finland (Figure 6.1.). Outside these areas, quite numerous finds of these ceramics are known from the Mälär area, particularly Birka, but also from Åland and from present-day north–west Russia, e.g. from Ryurik's Gorodishche, Staraya Ladoga, and the southern coast of Lake Ladoga.⁹⁹ In the area of present-day Latvia, this pottery was widespread mainly in the lower reaches of the Daugava River, including the hill-fort of Daugmale, and in northern Couronia.¹⁰⁰

According to the general opinion, this type of pottery, both its finer and coarser variants, disappeared everywhere in its former distribution area around 1000 AD or at the beginning of the 11th century,¹⁰¹ thus at the same time as the boom of the eastern trade came to an end and other changes took place. Still, it is not completely accurate to claim that ceramics ended in the area inhabited by Baltic Finns; we can rather talk of change. New forms of pottery appeared that clearly resembled the Viking Age variants.

Estonian inland ceramics that were also in use up to approximately the beginning of the 11th century and possessed several common traits with the Iru ceramics in the coastal areas are described as Rõuge-type pottery (Figure 6.17.).

97 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 275–277, 307–309.

98 In Scandinavian countries this is often simply called Finnish ceramics.

99 Kivikoski 1963: Pl. 12: 8, 19: 1, 39: 9–10; Lang 1996: 73–93; Tvauri 2012: 70–76; Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982a: 76–84; Ambrosiani & Bäck 2007.

100 Cimermane 1974.

101 Tvauri 2012: 76 and references.

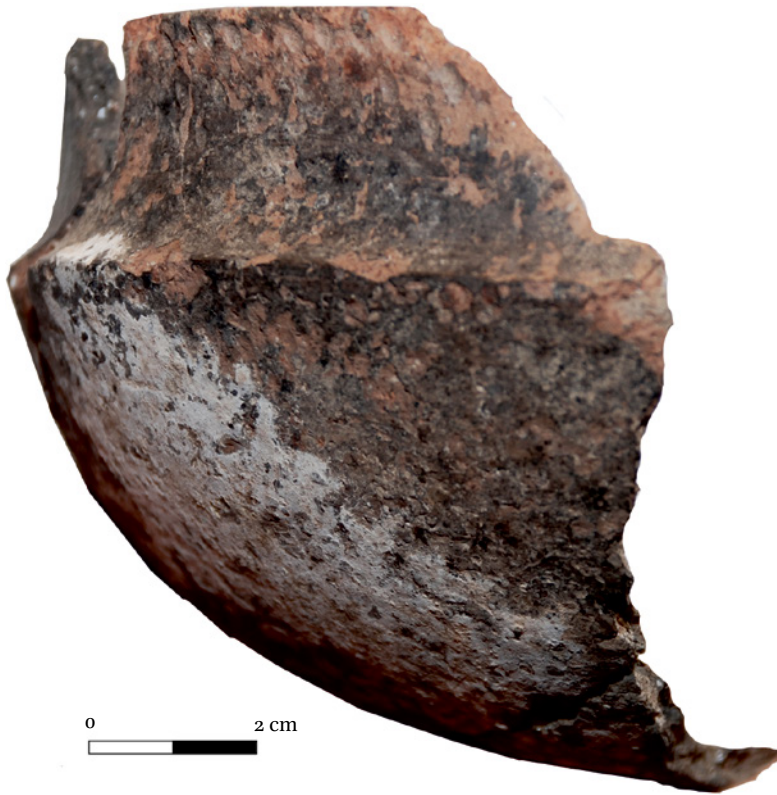


FIGURE 6.17 *Viking Age Røuge-type ceramics (TLU AI 4040:1243).*
 PHOTOGRAPHS BY V. KOBRUSEPP.

This type of ceramics has also been found in Irboska and Pskov, and in the district of Pskov, where it obviously reflects another common cultural sphere.¹⁰² In addition, Björn Ambrosiani and Mathias Bäck have assumed that ceramics in east Scandinavia, north-west Russia, and the Eastern Baltic are frequently indistinguishable from one another, but labelled as Scandinavian pottery when found in towns of north-eastern Russia.¹⁰³

Some forms of so-called Balto-Russo ceramics, which were pointed out by the Swedish researchers and were, according to them, widespread in the areas of present-day Latvia and Lithuania, can also be found in the area of present-day

¹⁰² Tvauri 2012: 76–78.

¹⁰³ Ambrosiani & Bäck 2007. It should be noted here that it remained unclear whether Ambrosiani and Bäck had in mind only 11th–12th century ceramics, or whether they considered ceramics from the Viking Age and later centuries as one group.

Russia.¹⁰⁴ Balto-Russo ceramics differ considerably, however, from pottery in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, especially from the thin-walled carinated pots. Local (ethnic) Baltic ceramics were widespread, for instance, in the trading place believed to have existed in Palanga, on the Lithuanian coast. Vladas Žulkus has suggested that pottery belonging to the types characteristic of southern Scandinavia has also been found in Palanga.¹⁰⁵ However, the ceramics illustrated by him as a proof for the suggestion represent types widespread in several coastal regions around the Baltic Sea.

Bäck has pointed to the existence of ceramics originating from the eastern coast of the Baltic in Birka as early as the 9th century. He believed that these early ceramic finds reflected not so much trade, but rather other aspects of interplay, e.g. mixed marriages or migration. The Eastern Slavic and oriental ceramics that prevailed in Birka after the mid-9th century were, according to Bäck, mainly the result of trade contacts.¹⁰⁶

6.3 Cultural Landscapes in the Middle Part of the Eastern Baltic

6.3.1 *Hill-Forts and Settlements along the Daugava River*

The lower reaches of the Daugava River are unsuitable for agriculture up to 20–25 km from the coast. These are by turns sandy areas and wetlands, combined with plentiful rivulets and ditches, as well as lakes. It is difficult to reconstruct the region of the lower reaches of Daugava in the Viking Age or even the Middle Ages, since the sea is continuously carrying new sand into the lower estuary of the river. The general opinion seems to be, however, that the Viking Age coast was somewhat closer to arable lands than in the present time.

The arable lands started approximately where the small island of Dole is situated in the Daugava River (Figure 6.18.). The first rapids upstream from the sea, Rumbule, were in the vicinity of the island. It was not normally possible to sail through the rapids of the Daugava River, meaning that ships or boats had to be drawn through them with a rope, or carried to the other side. There were more than a hundred rapids in the Daugava River just in the territory of the present-day Latvia, which certainly made the river much less navigable than one might assume when just looking at the map.

It was comparatively easy to attack travellers when they were passing the rapids, and the locals probably charged them a tax of some kind. Particularly

¹⁰⁴ Ambrosiani & Bäck 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Žulkus 1997: 212–213.

¹⁰⁶ Bäck 2010b.

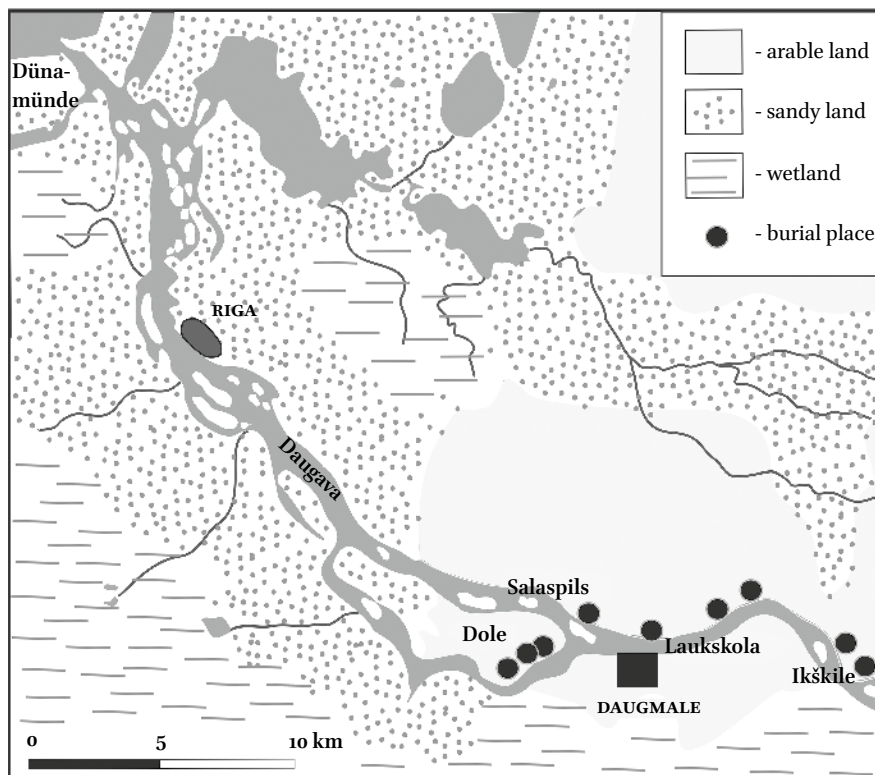


FIGURE 6.18 *The lower reaches of Daugmale River around 1000 AD. Drawn after present-day map.*

seven bigger and impassable rapids were known in the river, all with a hill-fort or several next to them.¹⁰⁷ Still, it was probably not considered too difficult to sail along Daugava with smaller and lighter river-boats, at least according to some early 13th-century written sources, even though it is unlikely that these boats could sail directly through the rapids.

The first compact and extensive cluster of arable lands, when looking from the sea, reaches the Daugava River between Salaspils and Ikšķile. Quite predictably this area is full of archaeological sites, indicating dense inhabitation. This was the key to the Daugava route – whoever controlled this area also controlled international traffic along the river.

The arable lands around the lower reaches of the Daugava River mainly embrace areas on the northern bank; only around Daugmale can some arable

107 Radiņš 1998.

land be found on its southern bank as well. Shortage or complete lack of fertile lands on the southern bank characterises the river up to Aizkraukle in central Latvia, and explains why the lower reaches seem to have been controlled mainly by Livs, who lived only on the northern coast. Quite a number of Latvian archaeologists state, however, that these areas were in the Middle Iron Age and the Viking Age inhabited by Semgallians,¹⁰⁸ even though they seem not to have left clear archaeological traces. It is also difficult to assume Viking Age habitation in districts without arable lands. According to topography, as well as to the distribution of archaeological evidence, there existed a 35–40 km-wide empty zone without real habitation between the Livic sites near the Daugava River, and the Semgallian sites near the Lielupe River with its numerous tributaries.¹⁰⁹ Instead of travelling through the forested area, it was certainly easier to sail from the Daugava River to Semgallia along water routes: there was a connection between the Daugava and Lielupe Rivers near their estuaries.

The Daugmale complex was situated in the middle of the arable cluster closest to the sea, immediately upstream from the first rapids. The location of this hill-fort and settlement was central to the agricultural terrain, connected with agrarian lands guaranteeing the hinterland from one side, and with a relevant water route from the other side. However, the southern bank of the river was chosen as the location of the hill-fort, not the northern bank where most people lived. It suggests that Daugmale was primarily a hill-fort in no-man's-land, although in the vicinity of a Livic settlement, which emphasises its international character and connection with trade.

Like Iru, the Daugava complex also began life in the Bronze Age. The site has been extensively excavated starting from the 1930s, but most of these works were carried out as rescue excavations in the 1960s and 1970s, in a hurry and with methods characteristic of this time. The area of the hill-fort was 0.4 ha and of the settlement 2 ha.¹¹⁰ The size of the complex was, accordingly, not so impressive, but more striking, when compared with other hill-forts and settlements in the region, was the great number of coins and other trade-associated artefacts uncovered there. The settlement adjacent to the Daugmale hill-fort was established as early as the 5th century, but its period of prosperity seems to have been the 10th–12th centuries.¹¹¹ Especially in this period, Daugmale was characterised by abundant traces of different craft products, particularly

108 Radīš 1998.

109 Apals *et al.* 1974: maps Figs 59 and 90.

110 Radīš 2006.

111 Zemītis 2007.

blacksmithery, bronze-, tin-, and silver-casting.¹¹² In the 10th century, strong fortifications, partly made of stone, were erected at the hill-fort.¹¹³

Arnis Rādiņš and Guntis Zemītis have presented the view that in the 9th century and the first half of the 10th century the Daugmale complex was inhabited by Sēmgallians, as is indicated by the archaeological evidence. According to them, the site turned truly multi-cultural only in the 11th century.¹¹⁴ It is difficult to test the argument, especially owing to the scantiness of publications on the Daugmale archaeology. However, the topographic conditions that were described above seem to contradict this idea. It is also left undefined what kind of finds have been considered Sēmgallian, particularly because quite a number of artefacts that are treated as Sēmgallian in Latvian archaeology also characterise parts of present-day Estonia, e.g. Saaremaa. The few Daugmale artefact types that are mentioned in this connection in publications – e.g. cruciform pins with flat heads or penannular brooches with poppy-head terminals¹¹⁵ – were also widespread on Saaremaa and in other parts of Estonia. It is also noteworthy that no contemporary Sēmgallian burials have been recorded in the Daugmale region so far, although there are numerous burial places known from the 9th–10th-century core areas of Sēmgallia.

Andris Caune and Zemītis have considered the Daugmale complex to have been a *vic*, according to the criteria that were proposed by Gleb Lebedev. Although Lebedev's *vics* were supposed to have ceased around 1000 AD, Daugmale remained for two more centuries, and this was treated by Zemītis as a special local development feature. Such slower development was caused, according to him, by slower social development in the Eastern Baltic.¹¹⁶

More than ten settlements have been excavated, but only poorly published, in the district around Daugmale. Researchers who have mentioned these partly defended settlements in their works normally refer to them as 10th–13th-century sites. As the lack of published material does not support a more detailed analysis of these settlements here, they will be described somewhat more fully in the next chapter, together with other 11th–12th-century evidence.

Some tens of kilometres upstream from Daugmale, another bigger Livic hill-fort – Lielvārde – was situated. It had also been in use through most of the Iron Age, while the most intensive period of activity was the 10th–13th centuries.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Rādiņš 2001; Zemītis 2007.

¹¹³ Zemītis 2007.

¹¹⁴ Rādiņš 1998, 2001, 2006; Zemītis 2007.

¹¹⁵ Zemītis 2007.

¹¹⁶ Zemītis 2007.

¹¹⁷ Rādiņš 2006.

The eastern border of the Livic-inhabited area was probably marked by the Aizkraukle hill-fort (0.5 ha) and settlement (3 ha) on the high northern bank of the Daugava River. The location was originally chosen because of formerly impassable rapids in the river. Although a big silver hoard consisting mainly of Western European coins was uncovered at Aizkraukle, no coins came to light during archaeological excavations. The hill-fort and settlement were used throughout the whole of prehistory, but most intensively in the 10th–13th centuries.¹¹⁸

On the northern bank of the Daugava River, arable lands continued upstream from Aizkraukle, but remained much more fragmented on the southern bank. The left bank is, in this area, considered the settlement of Seli, while the right bank was, starting from the 7th century, inhabited by Latgallians (Figure 6.19.). These ethnically Baltic groups were in the Viking Age characterised by large burial grounds with hundreds of burials, most of them equipped with grave goods (see Section 2.3.1.).

The most relevant Latgallian hill-forts on the banks of the Daugava River were Koknes and Jersika. Both were situated next to big rapids, and were most intensively used in the 10th–13th centuries. The area of Jersika hill-fort was 0.75 ha, and the adjacent settlement was 10 ha at the end of prehistory. Hill-fort fortifications were re-built more strongly particularly during the 10th century. Radiņš believes that Jersika was not a centre of international trade, but first of all a political centre, since only a few coins have been found during excavations there.¹¹⁹

Some Latgallian Daugava hill-forts were also abandoned in the course of the Viking Age. One of them, for instance, was Dignāja on the opposite bank from Jersika, where activity seems to have nearly stopped in the 11th century at the latest.¹²⁰ The Dignāja hill-fort has been considered the predecessor of Jersika.¹²¹

A specific complex of hill-forts is recorded at Pļaviņas rapids between Koknes and Jersika. Two hill-forts – Mežmaļi and Lokstene – were here on the right bank of the river, only 3.5 km from each other. Both were abandoned in approximately 1000 AD, and the first was used only during the 9th–10th centuries. Somewhat before the final abandonment of these hill-forts, in the 10th century, the Oliņkalns hill-fort was erected between the two. This one, together with the Sēlpils hill-fort on the opposite bank of the river, stayed in use until the 13th century.¹²²

118 Radiņš 1998; Šnē 2006.

119 Radiņš 2001.

120 Radiņš 1998, 2001.

121 Šnē 2006.

122 Radiņš 1998, 2001.



FIGURE 6.19 *Artefacts from 10th-century Latgallian male grave No 1 at Priekuļi (LVNM A 591–606).*

PHOTOGRAPH BY M. MÄGI.

Radiņš has drawn attention to the phenomenon that the hill-forts along the Daugava, from the 10th century onwards, formed a regular system controlling the waterway along the river. They were normally situated 20–40 km from each other, as a rule next to rapids. In the development of these hill-forts, Radiņš sees a turning point not around 1000 AD, as was characteristic of Estonia, but at the beginning of the 10th century, when some hill-forts were abandoned, some new ones erected, and several re-built with stronger fortifications.¹²³

123 Radiņš 1998.

He explained the phenomenon as caused by the intensified ambitions of Scandinavians in the east around 900 AD, which fits well with evidence from other countries. Certain changes took place at the same time in Estonia and north-west Russia (e.g. the burning of the big hill-fort at Iru, the abandonment of the Ljubscha hill-fort). It was also at the beginning of the 10th century that most Scandinavian colonies in Russia were founded.

Radiņš, together with several other researchers, connected the international trade along the Daugava River mainly with the Livs. Since the Livs, according to the view of these researchers, appeared in their area only in the second half of the 10th century, this time has also been linked to the increase of trade.¹²⁴ This interpretation relies very much on the evidence of burial customs. The more important mercantile role of the Livs is argued with the occurrence of numerous scales and weights in their frequently well-equipped individual graves, but also with more coins uncovered in the area where they lived. Most of the hill-forts in this area were, nevertheless, in use even before the 10th century, and some dirham finds also belong to the period before the appearance of the Livic graves.

The Daugava route was, according to Radiņš, not very relevant during the 9th–10th centuries, when speaking of the period in general. For travelling to Polotsk in the upper reaches of the Daugava River (there called the Western Dvina), the route through the big lakes between present-day Estonia and Russia, and along the Velikaya River and Pskov was presumably preferred until about 1000 AD.¹²⁵ Among Estonian archaeologists, the same opinion has been expressed by Mauri Kiudsoo, as well as by the author of this book.¹²⁶

Radiņš has also drawn attention to the fact that the earliest dirham finds around the Daugava-Dvina River are known from the upper reaches near Polotsk, that is, from present-day Belarus. The coins certainly reached there from the south or from the east. The earliest Scandinavian artefacts in the upper reaches of the river belong to the 9th or the beginning of the 10th century.¹²⁷ This was, however, the time when Scandinavian evidence was still quite modest; it is hard to talk of a more intensive concentration of 9th-century Scandinavian finds around Polotsk than characterised, for instance, the complex of Iru. The amount of Scandinavian items between the Western Dvina and Dnepr Rivers increased abruptly in the 10th century.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, pictures

124 Radiņš 1998; Šnē 2006.

125 Radiņš 1998.

126 Mägi 2011b; Kiudsoo 2013.

127 Eremeev 2007.

128 Eremeev 2007.

published of these Scandinavian finds also present several jewellery and weapon types that were widespread everywhere in the northern part of the Eastern Baltic, and could also have reached the Polotsk principedom from there, for instance along the route over Lake Peipus and the Velikaya River. In addition, Russian archaeologist Ivan Eremeev has emphasised that the majority of 10th-century Scandinavian artefacts between the Western Dvina and Dnepr Rivers were uncovered in graves that otherwise looked very local.¹²⁹

As for Gnëzdovo in the upper reaches of the Dnepr River, where one could pass over a watershed when travelling along the Daugava route, the concentration of Scandinavian artefacts characterised certain burial grounds, while only meagre archaeological evidence of Scandinavians is recorded in the surrounding areas. The settlement of Gnëzdovo was established at the turn of the 9th–10th centuries and was defended, that is, surrounded by an earthen wall in the first quarter of the 10th century. Scandinavian, Baltic, and Slavic artefact types were detected in the settlement, but the Scandinavian items predominantly belonged to the 10th century, especially the second half of it. The Gnëzdovo complex lost its importance at the beginning of the 11th century and, although some activity took place there later, from then on the find material demonstrated mainly local traits.¹³⁰

6.3.2 Saxo's Hellespont

The mention of hill-forts on the Daugava River in written sources dealing with the Viking Age is quite as speculative as was shown earlier for the north Estonian coastal hill-forts. Nobody knows what these places were actually called in the Viking Age. Since the Icelandic sagas mainly talk of *Estland*, *Eysýsla*, and *Aðalsýsla*, when talking of the Eastern Baltic in general, we can turn to Saxo Grammaticus again, who wrote about *Ruthenia*, *Curonia*, and *Samland*, but sometimes also of *Hellespont* (see Section 4.2.12.). The latter has normally been interpreted as the Daugava River.

The first of the Danish mythological kings militarily active in the east was, according to Saxo, the Danish king Haddings. He declared war on Lokero, the king of the Couronians, but was defeated, was taken into prison, and escaped. After that he attacked King Handvan in *Hellespont*, who resided in his city *Duna*, behind an impregnable defensive wall.¹³¹ The last place name supports the identification of *Hellespont* with the Daugava River (in German *Düna*).

¹²⁹ Eremeev 2007.

¹³⁰ Pushkina 2004.

¹³¹ Saxo Grammaticus, 1.6.7–11.

...he [Haddings] conducted a military attack on Handvan, king of the *Hellespont*, in the stronghold of *Duna*. Handvan was entrenched behind impregnable defence works and used the fortifications rather than a battle line for resistance. Since they could not surmount the parapet by assault, Haddings caused various species of birds whose habitat was there to be taken by skilled fowlers, and had burning fungi attached beneath their wings; when they sought the refuge of their nests again they set the city completely alight. The townsfolk in rushing about to extinguish the blaze left the gates undefended. He took Handvan in the attack, but gave him the opportunity of ransom by paying his own weight in gold and, although he was entitled to do away with his enemy, preferred to grant him life; thus he tempered his ferocity with mercy.¹³²

There were several strongly defended hill-forts on the lower reaches of the River Daugava in the early Viking Age. However, Daugmale was the very first hill-fort when sailing upstream from the sea, immediately after the very first unnavigable rapid at Rumbule.

Hadding's son Frotho attacked Couronia again, and this time apparently more successfully.¹³³

Enriched by his treasure-trove the king was able to equip himself with a fleet and sail into the territories of the Kurlanders. Their king Dorn, fearing a catastrophic war, is reported to have addressed this speech to his troops: "Chieftains, as we are faced by a foreign enemy furnished with the arms and wealth of almost the whole western world, we must strive for a sensible delay before fighting and keep him under the powerful grip of starvation. Such a malady is internal. It will be extremely difficult for him to vanquish this peril within his own people. Starving men are easily resisted. More effectively than with weapons we shall test our foes by making them fast, and drive home no sharper lance than famine. Having little to eat will supply a canker to gnaw at their strength. A plentiful armoury is undermined by a lack of food. This can hurl our missiles for us as we sit here, can undertake the duties and functions of battle for us. In this way we may cause danger without danger to ourselves ... Hunger wages war first. With him as our general let us take the earliest opportunity to strike. Let him decide the issue in our stead while our lines remain tranquil; only if he is overcome must our peace be disturbed ... So we can be responsible for damage to others with none to ourselves".

132 Saxo Grammaticus, 1.6.10.

133 Saxo Grammaticus, 2.1.4–5.

Acting accordingly, Dorne destroyed everything that he was uncertain of being able to defend, and so far anticipated the enemy's wrath in devastating his land that he left nothing intact for the invaders to seize. Then, taking the majority of his forces inside a town of tested strength, he allowed himself to be blockaded. Frotho was not sure whether he could storm it and therefore gave orders for several ditches of unusual depth to be dug within his camp, the earth to be secretly carted in baskets and dumped in the river near the city walls. He took care to keep Dorne ignorant of his device by covering the pits with a mass of turf, intending that the ground should cave in before the unsuspecting enemy and as a result they should plunge forward abruptly and be destroyed. After this he simulated a panic and withdrew his men from the lines for a short while. The people from the town bore hard on the camp, could gain no footing anywhere, and pitched headlong into the trenches, where Frotho's men rained down their spears and massacred them.

If we accept that Saxo's *Kurland* really was what is known as Couronia in later times, there are several candidates for King Dorne's town. The story indicates that the hill-fort was not close to the coast, but deeper inland along a river that was probably big enough for Viking ships to sail along it. There were several hill-forts fitting these criteria – e.g. Beltes or Talsi in Kurzeme.¹³⁴

These events were, according to Saxo, followed by Frodo meeting the *Ruthenian* war-lord Tranno, and later seizing the towns of *Rotala* and *Paltisca*. Thereafter, Frodo aspired to subjugate the whole of the east (*Orient*).¹³⁵ With this in view he again attacked Handvan, the king of *Hellespont*, and managed to take one of his strongholds.¹³⁶

Once the city was taken, Frotho's mind aspired to an Eastern empire [*Orientis imperium*] and he advanced against the bastions of Handvan. Alerted by the memory of how Haddings had sent his city up in flames, he rid every house of its resident birds so that there should be no risk of similar damage being inflicted. Frotho however, had a new trick up his sleeve. Exchanging clothes with the maidservants, he disguised himself as a young female warrior and went to the town as a deserter, shedding his masculine appearance and impersonating a woman. After conducting a complete and careful reconnaissance he sent an attendant the next day to order his army to station themselves by the walls; he would

134 Asaris *et al.* 2008: 108–118; Vasks 2011.

135 Saxo Grammaticus, 2.1.4–6.

136 Saxo Grammaticus, 2.1.8–9.

personally ensure that the gates were opened. That was how the sentinels were tricked; buried in sleep the city was torn apart, paying for its complacency with annihilation and finding its own indolence more grievous than the enemy's valour. In military affairs you may observe nothing more ruinous than men dozing in comfort, carefree, relaxed, unobservant, unwarrantably self-confident.

When Handvan saw his country's fortunes utterly overturned, he loaded his regal wealth into ships and sank them in the open sea, wanting to enrich the waves before his foes, though it would have been more satisfactory to capture his adversaries' goodwill by gifts of money than grudge mankind the advantage of its use. Later, on Frotho's sending emissaries to request the hand of his daughter, he replied that a victor should take care not to be corrupted by his triumphal success and so become haughty; rather he should remember to spare the vanquished, respect their former splendour, now overthrown, and learn to value the earlier prosperity of those whose fortunes had suffered. He should be cautious not to seize empire where he sought kinship and, if he desired to honour someone through marriage, should not at the same time sully him with mean degradation, for in his fervent greed he was liable to taint the dignity of the union. By the good breeding of his words he simultaneously made the conqueror his son-in-law and preserved the freedom of his realm.

Somewhat later in Saxo's book, *Hellespont* appears back on the scene – Jarmerik, another Danish king, fought against four pirate brothers from *Hellespont* and married their sister, whom he later allowed to be brutally executed.¹³⁷ *Hellespont* was attacked by Ragnar Lodbrok.¹³⁸

Afterwards, when Ragnar was proposing a campaign against the Hellespontines, he called an assembly of the Danes ... This done, he took all the sons that Thora had borne him, though not Ubbi, and in a series of bruising encounters subjugated the Hellespont and its king, Dian. Involving Dian in one disaster after another, he eventually obliterated him.

His sons, Dian and Daxon, who in the past had been apportioned the daughters of the Russian king in marriage, obtained the troops they

137 Saxo Grammaticus, 8.10.7ff.

138 Saxo Grammaticus, 9.4.20–21. Ragnar Lodbrok probably lived in the middle of the 9th century. Whether he actually had anything to do with the story passed on to us by Saxo is uncertain.

requested from their father-in-law and with blazing enthusiasm sped to execute the business of their father's revenge. On noting the vast army of his foes, Ragnar felt uneasy about his own forces; he therefore constructed bronze horses mounted on small wheels and had them brought round on easily manoeuvred carriages; then he gave orders for them to be launched with maximum velocity into the thick of the enemy. Their power broke up the opposing lines so well that prospective victory appeared to rest more on his machinery than his soldiery, for their irresistible weight smashed everything it struck. One general fell, the other slipped away, whereupon the entire Hellespontine army retreated. The Scythians too, attached to Daxon by close ties of blood on his mother's side, are reported to have been crushed in that defeat. Their province was assigned to Hvitserk, while the king of the Russians [*Ruthenorum rex*], diffident of his strength, hastened to fly off before Ragnar's awe-inspiring weapons.

Here Saxo gives an interesting detail that the sons of the *Hellespont* king Dian were married to daughters of a Russian king, and therefore got the *Hellespont*-people (the Livs or Latgallians?) to involve Russian troops to help as allies. King Dian himself seems to have been married to a noble Scythian woman.¹³⁹ As will be shown later, the Russian princedoms started to be particularly interested in the Daugava route in the course of the 10th century, suggesting that the story might have its roots in some narrative depicting this period.

6.3.3 *Egil's Adventures in Couronia*

Saxo's stories revealed that *Hellespont* was situated somewhere close to *Kurland*. Couronia, which otherwise seldom appears in saga literature, has been colourfully and vividly depicted in *Egil's Saga* as one of the targets of Egil's Viking raids.¹⁴⁰ The adventures described in this narrative might have happened in August or early September 936.¹⁴¹

Thorolf and Egil were held in high favour by Thorir over the winter and in the spring they fitted out a great longship and gathered a crew and in the summer sailed into *Austrvegr* and raided and plundered and fought in many encounters. They continued as far as *Kurland* and lay to there for a

139 Saxo Grammaticus, 9.4.20–21.

140 Egil's Saga, 46.

141 After Sayers 2013. Dating the events to late summer or early autumn is based on the description where it clearly is warm enough for sleeping outside living houses while it gets dark quite early. In Couronia, days are very long and nights short in June and July.

fortnight's rest and trade. And when this ended, they began to raid again and went ashore at various places.

One day they lay to in the mouth of a great river with a dense forest on the shores. They made plans to go ashore there and split into parties of twelve men each. They went into the forest and it was not long before they came to a first settlement. There they pillaged and killed some men but most of the inhabitants ran off and they met no real resistance. When the day was almost over, Thorolf had the horn sounded to recall the men and they turned back into the woods from wherever they had got to but the troop could not be counted until they got back to the shore. Yet when Thorolf got there, Egil had not arrived and night had begun to fall and they didn't think they could look for him.

Egil had gone through the forest with twelve men and then they saw great expanses of open land with settlements. There was a farm a little way off from them and they headed for it and when they came up to it they ran into the buildings but found no one there and they seized what valuables were lying about. There were many buildings and this took them a long time and, when they had come out and moved off from the farm buildings, a group of people had gathered between them and the woods and were advancing on them. A high palisade rose between them and the woods. Then Egil told them to follow him so that they could not be attacked from all sides...

[followed by how the Vikings were attacked]...

...They were wounded and then taken prisoner and all bound, and so were brought back to the farm.

The man who owned that farm was rich and powerful and he had a grown son. Then there was talk as to what was to be done with the prisoners. The farmer said that he thought it advisable that they should be killed one after the other. The farmer's son said that night was falling and that there would be no entertainment in torturing them. He asked that they should let things be until morning. They were then pushed into a building and tightly bound. Egil was tied hand and foot to a post. Then the building was securely locked and the Courlanders went into the main room to eat, drink, and enjoy themselves.

...[followed by how the Vikings broke out from the room where they were locked in]...

...They then came into another room. This too had log walls. They heard men's voices from below under their feet. They searched about and found a trap door in the floor. They raised it up and below was a deep pit

from which they heard the voices. Then Egil asked who was there. A man who called himself Aki answered.

Egil asked whether he wanted to get out of the pit. Aki replied that they gladly would. Then Egil and his companions let the ropes that they had been tied with down into the pit and pulled up three men. Aki said that the other two were his sons and that they were Danes who had been captured the previous summer. "I was well treated over the winter", he said, "and was kept busy tending the farmers' stock but the boys were made to work as slaves and didn't like that. In the spring we made plans to run off but we were caught. Then we were put here in this pit".

"Then you must know the layout of the farm buildings here", said Egil. "What is the best way to get out?"

Aki said that there was another plank wall. "If you break that down, you will come into the grain storeroom and from there you can go out as you like". Egil and the others did this, broke through the plank wall, then went into the granary and from there outside. It was pitch dark. Egil's men said that they should hurry off to the woods.

But Egil said to Aki, "If you know your way around the farm and buildings, then you should be able to show us where to get some loot". Aki said that there was no shortage of valuable goods.

"There is a big loft here where the farmer sleeps; there's no lack of weapons in there". Egil told them to go to the upper room and when they had come up the stairs they saw that the loft was open. There was light inside and servants who were making up the men's beds. Egil ordered some of his men to stay outside and guard that no one came out. Egil ran into the upper room, grabbed weapons, of which there was no lack, and killed all the people who were in there. Egil and his band armed themselves fully.

Aki went to where there was a trap door in the plank floor and opened it and said that they should go down into the small room below. They took lights with them and went down. The farmer's treasure chests were there, with many valuables and a lot of silver. The men loaded themselves up and carried the plunder out. Egil picked up a huge treasure chest in his arms by himself and carried it out under his arm. Then they went to the woods.

When they got to the woods, Egil pulled up and said, "This raid is bad business and is not manly: we have stolen the farmer's goods in such a way that he doesn't even know about it. We should never let ourselves be shamed in such a way. Let's go back to the farm and let people know

what's been going on". Everyone else spoke out against this proposal, saying that they wanted to go to the ship. Egil put down the treasure chest and raced off toward the farm.

...[followed by how Egil burnt down the farm and killed the people]...

Egil went back to the woods where he found his companions. They all returned together to the ship. Egil said that he wanted the treasure chest that he had carried back as his leader's share of the booty and it turned out to be full of silver. Thorolf and the others were delighted that Egil had returned. They set sail from land as soon as it was light. Aki and his sons stayed in Egil's party. As the summer wore on, they sailed to Denmark, keeping an eye out for trading ships and raiding wherever they went.

Here we can see a description of what can presumably be called a typical Viking raid – quick plundering with a comparatively small group of men, after which they rapidly turn back to their ship. Some descriptive details in the narrative leave no doubt that the events really happened in Couronia, probably on the Kurzeme peninsula. When sailing upstream one of the rivers, for instance the biggest Couronian river Venta, there was only really random inhabitation in the sandy and forested areas close to the sea.

As in the narratives that mentioned the area of present-day Estonia, languages seem not to have been a problem in Couronia, at least according to the story in *Egil's Saga*. The place in the story where Egil seems in some way to have understood what the Couronian peasant – who can probably better be called chieftain – discussed with his son about the fate of the prisoners, can perhaps be explained by someone in Egil's group understanding Baltic Finnish or Baltic languages. It could also just be an element added to the narrative to make it to look more dangerous. Somewhat more interesting is the information that the Dane Aki “was treated well and kept busy with tending the farmer's stock”, while his sons were sent to hard slave labour. It is probably not very likely that Aki functioned as an ordinary herder – a job that was normally reserved for children in the Eastern Baltic, at least in later times – and was satisfied with that; it seems more plausible that he was a kind of overseer or record keeper of the rich farm's cattle, which would also explain his excellent knowledge of the storerooms and little desire to escape. Such a scenario assumes, however, that the farmer and Aki understood each other, or that it seemed obvious to the original story-teller that there were no language problems when communicating with the Couronians.

The Couronian peasant was depicted as a wealthy man with numerous warriors, tenants, servants, and probably slaves. Later in the same story a good

sword belonging to Egil was mentioned, which originated in *Kúrland* and could easily have been one of the weapons he stole in the course of the episode in 936.¹⁴² It is also obvious that Egil attributed the Couronian chieftain the same value judgements that he himself possessed – he found it shameful, for instance, to escape with the man's treasure without openly announcing his plundering activities.

William Sayers, who has written about the story in *Egil's Saga* most recently, has reached the conclusion that the, for saga literature, extraordinarily long, nearly ethnographic description of Couronian buildings was meant to emphasise that the events happened in a remote and unknown country. The fact that Egil managed to gain treasure in such a country, and even in darkness, added value to Egil's deeds.¹⁴³ However, the story perhaps represents a combination of Snorri's late-12th-century world-view, where *Kúrland* was some unknown place far away, and (in the Viking Age reality) where it was a part of the Vikings' own world.

6.3.4 *Changing Burial Customs in Couronia and in the Estuary of the Daugava River*

The lower reaches of the River Daugava experienced great cultural change in the middle of the 10th century when extensive Livic cemeteries appeared. The largest were concentrated around the hill-fort and settlement of Daugmale, and can presumably be considered the burial places connected with this centre. Many Latvian archaeologists explain the sudden appearance of these cemeteries in an area with sparse early Viking Age finds as a large-scale migration from Couronia. It is however likely that Livic burials, as was also characteristic for Estonians, seldom left any archaeologically observable traces before the middle of the 10th century (see discussion on this matter in Section 2.3.2.).

A certain amount of 9th–10th-century Scandinavian artefacts, including female jewellery, have been recorded both in the Livic areas around the lower reaches of the Daugava River, and in the areas inhabited by Baltic Finns in the northern half of the Kurzeme peninsula. Zemītis has written about the earliest oval brooches near the estuary of the Daugava River, dated by him as early as the 7th century.¹⁴⁴ Latvian expert of oval brooches, Roberts Spīrgis, however, considers some oval brooches from Kurzeme to be the earliest in present-day Latvia, and dates them to the beginning of the 9th century. The first oval brooches in the area around the lower reaches of the Daugava River, according

¹⁴² Egil's Saga, 53.

¹⁴³ Sayers 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Zemītis 2007.



FIGURE 6.20 *Male inhumation grave No 2 at Palanga cemetery, Couronia, 9th–10th century (Griciuvienė 2009: 173).*

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to him, cannot be earlier than the second half of the 10th century.¹⁴⁵ This date is also true for all Scandinavian burials in Daugava-Livic cemeteries that seem to belong mainly to the 10th century.¹⁴⁶

As was characteristic for Estonia and the Livic areas, no certain burial grounds belonging to the period from the 8th till the mid-10th centuries are known from the Baltic Finnic part of Kurzeme.¹⁴⁷ This phenomenon makes it complicated to define possible cultural impacts in the material culture. Still, there are some stray finds, as well as some few probable Scandinavian graves. In addition to the two pairs of 9th–10th-century oval brooches, some Gotlandic animal-head brooches and a few other artefacts have been recorded (Figure 6.13.). These items were found mainly at Zlēku on the middle reaches of the Venta River, or around the Talsi hill-fort and settlement. Still, the oval brooches were in the same complex with local ornaments, for instance chain holders. The complex contained, in addition, some bracelets that Spirģis treated as Scandinavian as well,¹⁴⁸ but that actually were widespread in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, as well as in Finland and north–west Russia.¹⁴⁹

Generally, Scandinavian finds in Couronia were rare after the abandonment of the Swedish colony in Grobiņa.¹⁵⁰ At the same time, the Viking Age graves of Baltic Couronians often included abundant grave goods of local types (Figures 6.20. and 6.21.). The meagre evidence of middle and late Viking Age Scandinavian artefacts in Couronia, on the other hand, correlates well with the unimpressive number of Kufic coins found in this region.

6.4 Coin Finds in the Eastern Baltic

Coin finds and hoards consisting of coins have normally been considered the best markers for indicating the intensity of trade. In the coastal areas of present-day Estonia, the evidence based on 9th–10th-century coins is in clear contrast to the apparent lack of finds, caused by the lack of graves. In the southern parts of the Eastern Baltic, in areas characterised by abundant Viking Age burial grounds with numerous artefacts, the number of coins is many times smaller than in Estonia. Clearer than anything else is the

145 Spirģis 2008: 495–496.

146 Zariņa 2006: 317–320, 424–427; Spirģis 2008: 347–375, 492–496.

147 Asaris *et al.* 2008: 57.

148 Spirģis 2008: 336–343.

149 Mägi-Lõugas 1995.

150 Asaris *et al.* 2008: 54–56; Bliujienė 2008.

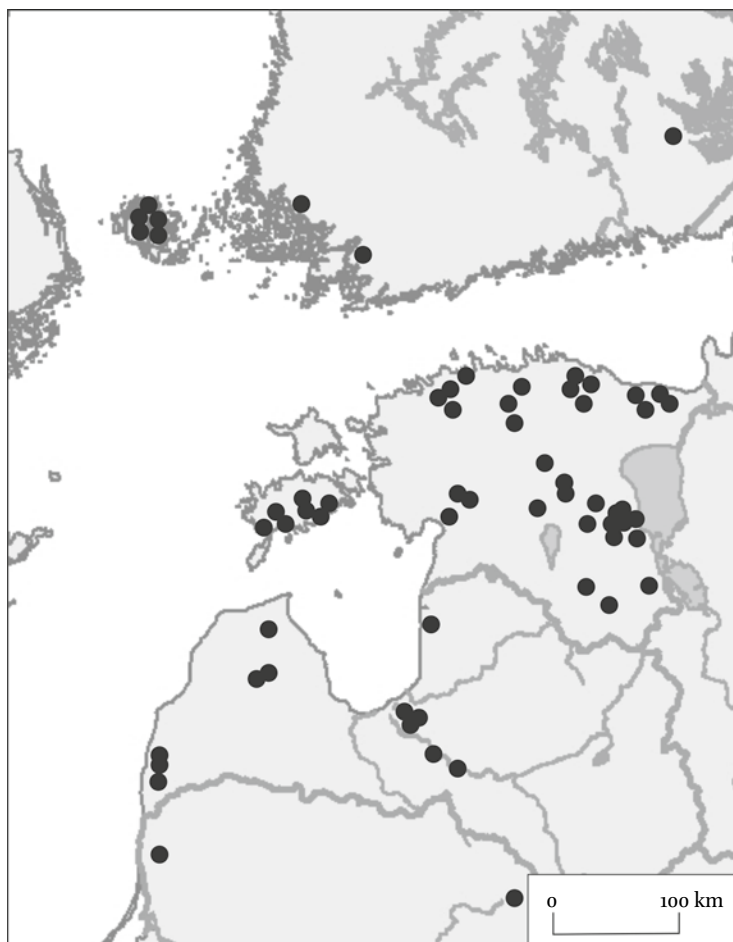


FIGURE 6.22 *Hoards consisting of dirhams. Based on: Duksa 1981; Talvio 2002: maps 2, 3; Leimus 2007b; Ducmane & Ozoliņa 2009: 76–77.*

concentration of dirham finds around the most relevant communication routes (Figure 6.22.).

6.4.1 *Dirhams*

It is impossible to estimate the exact number of dirhams in the countries around the Baltic Sea, let alone the large territory of present-day Russia. Therefore, only proportions between the find materials in different areas have been analysed here. In terms of value, the weight of silver played a more essential role than coins as such; the coins were often fragmented, and hoards could include silver ingots and jewellery. A considerable number of silver hoards,



DIAGRAM 6.1 *The distribution of dirhams.*

SOURCES: DUKSA 1981; TALVIO 2002: 9 AND REFERENCES; DUCMANE & OZOLINA 2009: 75–90; LEIMUS 2007B. ONLY RATIOS HAVE BEEN SHOWN.

as well as stray finds, have come to light during the last two decades, owing to the use of metal detectors. The proportion of these finds that actually reach researchers probably varies markedly in different countries.

The following diagram of Kufic coins found in areas around the Baltic Sea (Diagram 6.1.), although without exact numbers, is based on studies by different numismatists at different times. Even without exact numbers, it is obvious that the number of dirham finds varies remarkably in different countries or regions. In addition, clear differences actually exist between districts within the countries shown (e.g. inside mainland Sweden). Russia has been left out of the diagram since the known number of dirhams found there is about twice as many as in Gotland. A great part of the Russian finds probably come from the north-western part of the country; nevertheless, it is not known how many. Russia as a whole covers a huge area, and the data is too thin and in any case out of scale to be presented in the diagram.

As indicated in the diagram, the absolute leader position of dirham finds is held by the island of Gotland – a phenomenon that has produced several attempts at explanation.¹⁵¹ Quite a number of Kufic coins have also been uncovered in the eastern and northern islands of the Baltic – Åland and Saaremaa. The number of Kufic coins on Åland is greater than in the rest of Finland; most of the mainland Finnish finds were also concentrated in the south-western corner of the country. Very few or almost no dirhams have been found along the southern coast of Finland, once again supporting the theory about sailing routes turning south to the Estonian coast after crossing the narrowest part of the Gulf of Finland near the present-day Tallinn.¹⁵²

The number of Kufic coins found in Estonia is about ten times that found in mainland Finland; about half of these finds come from north Estonia. The

151 For a short overview of ideas see e.g. Gustin 2004: 195–197.

152 Talvio 2002: 128–130.

majority of Estonian dirhams have come to light from hoards, and only a small part from graves, predominantly from later periods' burial grounds.¹⁵³ In the middle of the 2000s, more than 40 silver hoards consisting only of Kufic coins were known in Estonia.¹⁵⁴ The small number of dirhams known from graves is obviously connected with Estonian burial customs – badly burnt and fragmented artefacts in mixed cremations, and a general lack of graves or grave goods before the last quarter of the 10th century. It is understandable, therefore, that dirhams as grave goods have been recorded together with artefacts from later periods than the time when the Kufic coins originally reached the Baltic Rim. In some cases, dirhams were used as pendants even in the 13th–14th centuries or later.

Estonian silver hoards were buried in the ground in the regions with the best arable lands, that is, in the areas where their owners probably lived. One can note that the hoards concentrate in areas in the neighbourhood of north Estonian Viking Age hill-forts, at a distance of no further than one day's travel from them (compare with Figure 6.15.). Especially abundant dirham finds in the fertile hinterlands of Iru and Tallinn/*Rafala* stand out in this connection, but hoards are also known from the hinterlands of the Pada and Purtse hill-forts.

A considerable number of Kufic coins seem to mark the route along central Estonian rivers and wetlands (see more detail in Section 3.2.5.). Concentration in the areas surrounding the hill-fort and settlement of Tartu can be pointed out here, although from the Tartu complex itself only one hoard has been uncovered.¹⁵⁵ Even more noteworthy is the number of dirham finds around the lower reaches of the Pärnu River, where other Viking Age finds were rare and where the lack of arable land suggests only sparse habitation. The Pärnu River is, at the same time, the biggest flow of water through present-day Estonia, from where it was possible, over comparatively short watersheds, to reach Lake Võrtsjärv, the Emajõgi River, and the big Lake Peipus. The same itinerary was probably in use as a winter route, and, in the opposite direction, during the big spring floods.

Numerous dirham finds on the island of Saaremaa and in west Estonia can be connected with control over sailing routes through the waters around these areas. Not only ships bound for the north Estonian coast, but also those heading to the Daugava River all had to pass in close proximity to the Saaremaa islands in particular. The biggest Viking Age concentration of Kufic coins in the present-day Latvia is predictably in the lower reaches of the Daugava River,

153 Leimus 2007b.

154 Leimus 2007a.

155 Kiudsoo 2013.

where arable lands began, that is, about 20 kilometres from the coast.¹⁵⁶ Kufic coins are also recorded in Livic burial grounds in the same district, although mainly in 11th–12th-century graves.¹⁵⁷ As components of hoards, dirhams were also spread in different places along the Daugava River, whose relevance as a trade route obviously gained momentum from the 11th century onwards. The number of dirhams in the whole of Latvia is about half of that found in Estonia.

In Couronia, Kufic coins have been found in the Kurzeme Peninsula and, quite predictably, in the vicinity of Grobiņa. Another concentration point is around present-day Palanga and Klaipėda in the Lithuanian part of Couronia. There, dirhams were also found in some 8th–10th-century graves; this is an area where graves are known from this period. Single dirham finds are registered in the middle reaches of the Neris River, around Vilnius. Nevertheless, the number of Kufic coins found in the present-day Lithuania is generally very modest, when compared with other areas on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea.¹⁵⁸

The best indicators of Viking Age communication and trade are certainly the hoards that were buried in the time when dirhams reached the Baltic Rim, which in the Eastern Baltic means the period from the 9th till the early 11th centuries. A comparatively large percentage of dirhams occurs, however, in later hoards, mixed with other coins, mainly those minted in Western Europe. These later hoards were normally still widespread in the same areas as hoards consisting entirely of Kufic silver. A conspicuous exception to this rule is the Daugava River, where the 9th–10th-century dirham hoards were hidden only in the lower reaches, while dirhams inside later hoards were known in different areas along the river. Some researchers have also pointed to the likelihood that coins were added to at least some of the deposits over several centuries, which could explain the very variable content of silver hoards.¹⁵⁹

6.4.2 *Particularities of Dirham Finds*

Estonian silver hoards up to around 1000 AD normally consist only of coins, while hoards buried after that also contain quite a considerable amount of jewellery. Hack-silver is rare both in Estonian and in Latvian deposits, but occurs in some of the few Lithuanian hoards. The absence of jewellery in the 9th–10th-century silver-hoards is linked to the absence of grave goods in the same period, and probably refers to the ritual meaning of at least part of the

¹⁵⁶ Ducmane & Ozolina 2009: 76–77.

¹⁵⁷ Berga 2006.

¹⁵⁸ Dukša 1981.

¹⁵⁹ Talvio 2002: 117–119.

hoards. Fragments of some Viking Age silver ornaments, for instance some dress pins typical of Saaremaa, have however been found among hack-silver in some south Scandinavian deposits,¹⁶⁰ and the existence of 9th–10th-century silver ornaments has also been indicated by some offerings, found e.g. at Viidumäe on Saaremaa.¹⁶¹ When customs changed at the end of the 10th century, and when from then onwards abundant ornaments were buried with the deceased, ornaments also started to play a prominent role in the contents of hoards.

Another aspect connected with the dirham finds is the use of Kufic coins as pendants. In Estonia, where few graveyards with cremations are known from the time before the last quarter of the 10th century, and inhumations are nearly unknown from this period, it is unclear whether and how often dirhams were used as pendants in the Viking Age. It is, however, known that such pendants were comparatively widespread in the period after the Viking Age, and at least one necklace consisting of dirham pendants is known from a Viking Age hoard as well. Coin-pendants were common in the Viking Age part of the Luistari inhumation cemetery in Finland, and the same is indicated by other Finnish dirham finds – large numbers of them have been used as pendants.¹⁶² Over 10% of Estonian dirhams have been made into pendants or perforated.¹⁶³

Dirham pendants have also been found in Livic (or of other ethnicity, see Section 7.4.3.) graves in the lower reaches of the Daugava River.¹⁶⁴ In present-day Russia, especially in the areas that in the Viking Age were probably inhabited by Baltic Finns, necklaces with coin-pendants are supposed to have come into use mainly in the 10th century;¹⁶⁵ still, this assessment can, again, be biased by the fact that in most Baltic Finnic areas grave goods are rare or unknown before the last quarter of the 10th century. In areas inhabited by ethnic Balts, in contrast, coin-pendants are rare finds in their numerous Viking Age graves.¹⁶⁶ This corresponds, however, with the generally few Kufic and other coins found in these areas, as well as with the generally small number of pendants.

The use of dirhams as pendants enabled wearers to show them off and thus demonstrate one's wealth through what were normally female decorations. Copious necklaces with a great number of coin-pendants still belong to the native costume of several Finno-Ugrian peoples, including the Setu in south-east

¹⁶⁰ Hårdt 1976: Taf. 20:10, 11.

¹⁶¹ Jets & Mägi 2015.

¹⁶² Talvio 2002: 126.

¹⁶³ Calculated according to Leimus 2007b.

¹⁶⁴ Berga 2006.

¹⁶⁵ Talvio 2002: 126 and references.

¹⁶⁶ See also Šnē 2006.

Estonia. It should be noted that among the Baltic Finns, where it was customary to have abundant coin-pendants, the use of glass beads for decoration was correspondingly uncommon. Although the small number of Viking Age grave goods or burial grounds does not allow us to draw proper conclusions about the use of beads either, the number of beads used among the Baltic Finns in the 11th–12th centuries was clearly more modest than in Viking Age Scandinavia. In most cases, we can only talk of simple one-line necklaces with quite similar beads, sometimes together with some coin-pendants. It may be speculated, therefore, that Viking Age glass beads that have often been equated with dirhams because of their price, might have been less in demand than dirhams in some areas, e.g. in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic.

The distribution of Eastern Baltic and Finnish dirhams predominantly in hoards and graves is presumably the main reason why quite large numbers of the coins are intact (in Estonia, e. g. more than 60% of dirhams are intact). Scandinavian researchers have suggested that intact or nearly intact coins were intentionally selected for hoards, while fragmentary coins that are mainly found in trading places were in everyday use. Of the dirhams uncovered in excavations at the Birka trading place in the 1990s, 70% were smaller than one quarter of a coin.¹⁶⁷ Such tiny fragments might not have been picked up or even noticed in earlier excavations, where neither sieves nor metal detectors were used. It is, therefore, unknown if such fragmented coins might also have been found in the few trade centres that have been excavated in the Eastern Baltic. This is especially true for Iru and Daugmale which were both excavated many decades ago and with methods in use at the time.

6.4.3 *The End of the Boom in the Eastern Trade*

The inflow of new dirhams stopped in most Scandinavian areas around 960 AD, but on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea some Kufic coins still arrived in the early 11th century. In present-day Russia, the last dirhams are dated to the middle of the 11th century. Only individual Kufic coins minted at the beginning of the 11th century can be found on Gotland and the Swedish mainland.¹⁶⁸ Still, the differences are obvious not only between east and west, but also between the northern and southern areas.

As was shown earlier in this book, the inflow of Kufic coins to the lower reaches of the Vistula River and to former Prussia stopped as early as the middle of the 9th century. In other Polish areas, the latest dirhams found had normally been minted in the third quarter of the 10th century.¹⁶⁹ However, the

¹⁶⁷ Blackburn 2008: 43–44.

¹⁶⁸ Leimus 2007 and references.

¹⁶⁹ Leimus 2007a and references.

diminishing number of Kufic coins in the middle of the 9th century was not an isolated phenomenon characteristic of former Prussia. The latest dirham finds also date to the beginning of the 9th century in some other places, for instance in Arkona on the island of Rügen.¹⁷⁰ In south Scandinavian trade centres Kaupang and Uppåkra, the inflow of Kufic coins noticeably dried up after 850 AD, although a smaller number of dirhams reached these places up to as late as the mid-10th century.¹⁷¹ The cessation of new Kufic coins in south Scandinavia coincided with the abandonment of the Scandinavian colony in Grobiņa and the presumably diminishing relevance of the Amber Route on the eastern coasts of the Baltic. Trade that brought the dirhams into Northern Europe blossomed, accordingly, in Kaupang and Uppåkra predominantly in the 9th century, while the supremacy period for Birka was the first half of the 10th century. Earlier Kufic coins are found in Birka as well, but the majority of dirhams uncovered there date to the 9th or 10th centuries.

Developments in other areas topographically connected with the Eastern Way are synchronised with Birka. There are some 9th-century dirham hoards in Åland and Estonia, as well as individual dirhams in Finland and Latvia; nevertheless, most of the silver hoards consisting of Kufic coins in these areas were hidden in the soil in the 10th century. It is understandable, therefore, that the Samanid coins dominate the dirham deposits in the areas around the northern half of the Baltic Sea.¹⁷² The Samanid Empire existed as a great power between the Caspian Sea and the Indian Ocean mainly during the 10th century. The connection between the Baltic Sea and the Samanid Empire ran along the Volga River, that is, along *Austrvegr*, the Eastern Way. Merchants travelling from the Baltic Sea and from the Samanid Empire met in trading places of the Volga-Bulgars in the middle reaches of the Volga River. The Volga-Bulgars had been converted to Islam at the beginning of the 10th century.¹⁷³

The pattern of how Kufic coins from different regions and times were distributed in the Baltic Rim suggests that dirhams from countries that can more easily be reached via the Mediterranean or the Black Sea, e.g. the Abbasid or Umayyad coins, found their way to the southern coasts of the Baltic Sea.¹⁷⁴ The most likely itineraries from the Baltic to the Mediterranean ran along the Western European coasts or along the big Central and Southern European rivers, and along the Danube or Dnepr Rivers, when heading to the Black Sea. The most suitable routes towards the Dnepr River ran, according to the topography

170 Kilger 2008: 218–219.

171 Blackburn 2008: 50.

172 Leimus 2007; Blackburn 2008: 43–44.

173 Leimus 2007a.

174 See also Noonan 1994: 218.

of the Eastern Baltic, along the Daugava or Nemunas Rivers, but it was also possible to sail along the Gulf of Finland to the Ladoga and Ilmen Lakes, thus visiting the trade centres in Staraya Ladoga and Ryurik's Gorodishche. However, the distribution of dirham finds does not support the idea that the itineraries along the Daugava and Nemunas Rivers were in intensive international use in the 9th–10th centuries. Political instability in the area of later Kiev-Rus can offer a possible explanation, especially for the first half of the 9th century. It was also referred to in *Annales Bertiniani* in the late 830s, where the *Rus'* gave the insecurity of what was probably the route through later Kiev-Rus as the main reason why they had chosen to travel through the Frankish Empire (see Section 4.3.2.).

The Scandinavian impact on the territory of present-day Russia was most intensive in the 10th century, that is, in the time when *Austrvegr* towards the Volga River was in its heyday as well. The route was in use earlier and after this century, but the most extensive trade along it undoubtedly took place in the 10th century. Russian archaeologists have suggested that, as indicated by the distribution of dirhams, the itinerary towards the Volga River prevailed over the route southwards to the Dnepr River in the 9th–10th centuries.¹⁷⁵ It was the period when abundant Samanid silver coins flowed to the Baltic Sea countries. This was presumably benefited by the fact that dirhams in the Samanid Empire were predominantly used for the stimulation of exports, that is, mainly for foreign trade.¹⁷⁶

All trade along the Dnepr and Volga Rivers flowed through the Khazar Khaganate. Thomas Noonan believed that the heyday of dirham trade in the first half of the 10th century could be explained by the fact that in precisely this period the Khazar Khaganate was under political and military pressure from the Petchenegs, Kiev-Rus, the Volga-Bulgarian state, and Byzantium.¹⁷⁷ The unstable political situation favoured the activity of individual gangs consisting of merchants and warriors, who allied themselves with different fighting sides. In the 960s, Kiev-Rus succeeded in demolishing the Khazar Khaganate.

Although the decline of the khaganate must have unsettled trade networks that had thus far functioned more or less smoothly,¹⁷⁸ this alone cannot explain the cessation of Kufic coins in the Eastern Baltic lands. Other and probably even more relevant reasons can be seen in the consolidation of power and Christianisation of Kiev-Rus. Shared religion introduced a common cultural sphere with Byzantium, from which people following other religions were

¹⁷⁵ Nosov 2005.

¹⁷⁶ Noonan 1994: 218.

¹⁷⁷ Noonan 1994: 219.

¹⁷⁸ Noonan 1994: 219ff.

excluded on a much greater scale than before. Trade certainly continued, and the consolidation of power may only have increased its safety. On the other hand, the princes of Kiev-Rus were hardly likely to tolerate unpredictable Viking gangs in the territories under their control. The interests of foreign traders became the concern of the princes and their administration.

Still, the inflow of Kufic coins stopped 50–100 years earlier in the Scandinavian countries and the southern coasts of the Baltic, compared with Kiev-Rus, where these coins still reached during the first half of the 11th century. To find the key explanations for the cessation of the dirham trade, it would therefore be useful to look at the countries around the Baltic Sea, particularly Scandinavia. It seems that those who lost interest in *Austrvegr* as early as the late 10th century, were the Scandinavians themselves, thus causing the cessation of dirhams as well as the abandonment of several trading centres. Again, alterations in the social order can be seen behind these changes, both in Russia and in the Scandinavian states. The second half of the 10th century marks state-making processes and conversion to Christianity on both sides. States regulate international trade and control military campaigns, while Christianity favoured closer contacts between the Scandinavian states and other European countries. These updated contacts were reflected in silver hoards around the Baltic Sea, where dirhams were replaced by coins minted in Western European kingdoms. In the Eastern Baltic, Western European coins became dominant in hoards in the 11th century.

6.4.4 *Byzantine Coins in the Eastern Baltic*

Although Byzantine influence in Scandinavia is obvious, e.g. in iconography, the number of Byzantine coins is surprisingly small. The majority of silver coins from Byzantium found in northern Europe were *miliarenses*, minted during the second half of the 10th century.¹⁷⁹ Somewhat exceptional is a hoard at Ocksarve on Gotland that contained, together with other coins, 123 Byzantine *miliarenses*, 112 of them from the period 1042–1055. The hoard was hidden as late as the 12th century.¹⁸⁰

As is known from written sources, some Scandinavians were employed as royal body guards in Constantinople. However, very little of the salary paid to them seems to have reached the North. The Ocksarve collection is the only one in Scandinavia that could hypothetically be considered big enough to be interpreted as part of the salary paid to a Gotlandic mercenary or former member of the Varangian guard.¹⁸¹ It can be speculated here that the written sources

179 Horsnæs 2009; Leimus 2009.

180 Lamm 2007.

181 Lamm 2007; Leimus 2009.

TABLE 6.1 *The distribution of miliarenses in the Northern Europe. Based on Leimus 2009.*

Sweden	582	more than half from Gotland, incl. 123 in Ocksarve
Estonia	215	including 143 in Völla
Poland	about 200	
Russia	50–60	more than half from NW-Russia
Denmark	about 40	
Latvia	24	
Finland	22	
Norway	20	
Lithuania	1	

mentioning Varangians in the service of the Byzantine Emperor referred to exceptional rather than regular service. Varangians in Byzantium became more obvious in the 11th century, when the rapidly diminishing Scandinavian archaeological evidence rather suggests that these men more likely came from the Kiev-Rus, even if they had some Scandinavian blood in their veins.

However, Byzantine *miliarenses* are also rare in other countries and, surprisingly enough, in Russia, too. The table above shows the number of these coins known in different countries in slightly different times:

The frequently supported opinion is that these coins were accidental by-products of the international relations that brought in Kufic coins, rather than evidence for direct contact with the Byzantine Empire. In most cases *miliarenses* were found mixed with other coins and in small quantities. There are only two exceptions to this rule – Ocksarve, mentioned earlier, and Völla in west Estonia.

The Völla hoard was found in a small village near the lower reaches of the Pärnu River, actually close to its tributary, where some arable lands begin slightly more than 10 km from the sea. It contained over 500 coins, 143 of them *miliarenses* and 63 dirhams. The most recent coin in the hoard was minted in 1002/1003 AD, but the *miliarenses* belonged to the period 945–989.¹⁸²

Völla is the biggest collection of Byzantine coins in Northern Europe. Its location close to an important trade route, but in arable lands somewhat further away, suggests that its owner was some local person. More than for Ocksarve, there are good grounds for believing that the owner had perhaps personally been in Byzantium. Names mentioned in contracts between the *Rus'* and Byzantium also contained Finnic names and it can be speculated that some

182 Leimus 2009.

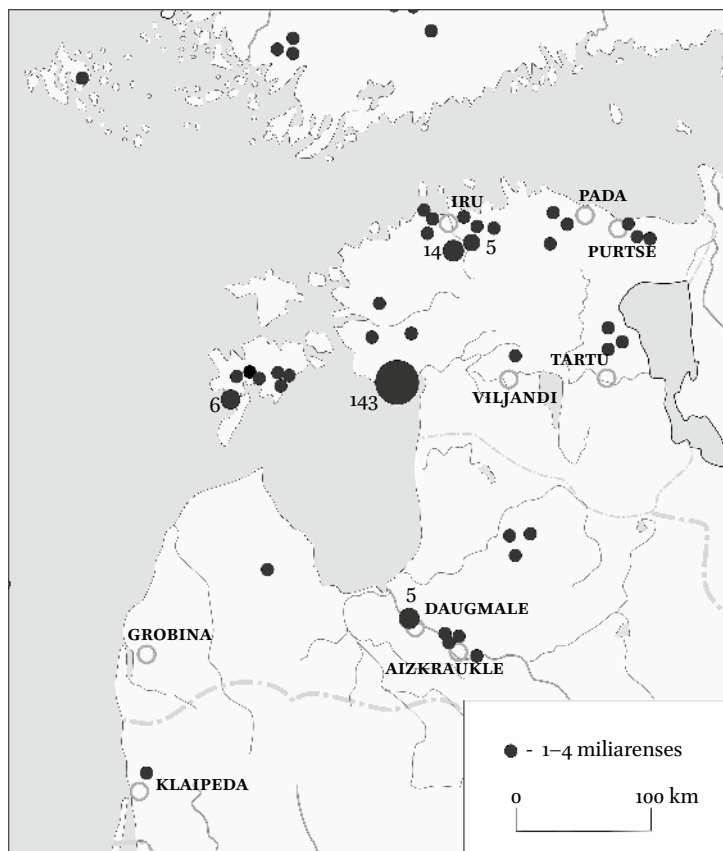


FIGURE 6.23 *Byzantine coins on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Based on: Duxa 1981: 88; Berga 1988: Fig. 17; Talvio 2002: 104–106, 131–217; Leimus 2009.*

people in the common martial sphere could have had parallel names in Finnic and Old Norse (see Section 4.4.).

The distribution map of Byzantine finds in the Eastern Baltic (Figure 6.23.) agrees not only with the most important international trade routes, but also with their changes over time. As was typical of the 10th century, most of the coin finds were still concentrated along the two main trade routes through Estonia, while the Daugava Way was marked by considerably fewer finds. Few Byzantine coins have been found elsewhere in the Eastern Baltics.

6.5 Interpreting Routes and Centres in the 9th–10th Centuries

The study presented in this chapter has drawn attention to some relevant aspects that still seem to pattern most of the research on Viking Age communications

over the Baltic Sea, more or less on all of its coasts. The first of them is the tendency to consider the whole period from about the 8th to the 12th centuries as one unit, without distinguishing between centuries. The era, however, can be divided into different periods that vary from each other in several aspects, making it questionable to use sources from one period to explain some processes in another.

Especially in the eastern Baltic, another phenomenon is the strict division according to ethnic lines and equating these with present-day state borders. Particularly questionable here is the term “Baltic”, which is used widely differently by researchers from different countries, but often also inside a country. Somewhat similar has been the use of the term “Finnish”, which can include Estonia, Livonia, and north-west Russia, but can also indicate only present-day Finland. In the worst cases, particularly the areas of present-day Estonia can easily find themselves in a sort of academic no-man’s-land, being not Baltic from one side, but not Finnish from the other side either.

It is astonishing how widely archaeological interpretations even in our times still rely on written sources. More or less intentionally, the few writings about the Viking Age have been frequently treated as real truths, leading to attempts to fit the archaeological evidence to the frames created by some random narratives, even if these appear to contradict one another. The information that has come down to us from the period a millennium ago is so scanty, that all parts of it should certainly be used to try to put together as plausible a picture as possible. This is not a call to push written sources aside, but to use them more intensively as illustrations for archaeological evidence, and not the other way round.

As has been pointed out in several places in this chapter, the character of writings that we have available is at least as haphazard as archaeological evidence, not to mention that most of these narratives were written down centuries after they were told, and accordingly reached us in heavily modified form. Place names especially should be treated with caution, and we should not expect more precise geographical knowledge from early medieval writers than most people have in our own time. What is more, everything that was written down about the eastern coasts of the Baltic in the Middle Ages was recorded by foreigners, which assuredly amplified some aspects, while ignoring others.

6.5.1 *Indicators of Trade Places*

The question of what artefacts or features have been considered as indicators for trade seems to be central in discussing trade routes. The most widespread in Eastern Baltic archaeology seems to be to treat mainly silver scales and weights as such indicators, especially in the southern half of the region. In Latvia,

where the number of coin finds is bigger than in Lithuania, these have also been believed to indicate trade, although the evidence of so called “merchants’ equipment” found in graves dominates the interpretations. Still, several Latvian archaeologists have, as an example, referred to dirham hoards around the lower reaches of the Daugava River as something unusual,¹⁸³ although this assessment is valid only when comparing this area with the regions inhabited with ethnic Balts, and not with, for instance, northern Estonia. In Estonia, where there are numerous coin finds, some archaeologists have started to emphasise the importance of scales and weights as well, while underestimating the evidence of silver hoards.¹⁸⁴

The evidence of scales and weights in burials is however an argument that should be treated with more caution, especially because it is highly dependent on burial customs. When it is not customary to deposit artefacts in graves, scales and weights in burials are unlikely either. Even when beliefs in a particular society ordain the use of grave goods, scales and weights are more likely to be found in areas where inhumations dominate, for instance in the Lower Daugava area.

Silver scales and weights have been emphasised as finds characteristic of trading places in some earlier research, notably by Johan Callmer.¹⁸⁵ Søren Sindbæk, who has systematically gone through the material from a number of Viking Age trading places around the Baltic Sea, has, on the other hand, pointed to the lack or shortage of scales and weights in several, sometimes quite big and well excavated sites (e.g. Ralswiek on the island of Rügen, or Kołobrzeg in the estuary of the Parsęta River).¹⁸⁶ However, both scales and weights are normally represented among the find material of the internationally more relevant places (nodal points, according to his classification).

Sindbæk has also discussed other criteria for defining trading places, as well as the way in which these depend on excavation methods. Especially whether the soil was sieved through or not seems to be most relevant. The researcher concluded that the most trustworthy indicators for classifying a particular site as a trading place were, however, signs of manufacture, especially traces of textile and bone-antler production, as well as blacksmithery. In addition, finds connected with bronze casting or the production of glass beads in Scandinavia are almost entirely characteristic of trading places, and only seldom occur in ordinary agrarian settlements. These sites do not necessarily need to

183 E.g. Zemītis 2007 with references.

184 Tvauri 2001: 185–194, 203–208; 2012: 219–238.

185 Callmer 1994, 2002.

186 Sindbæk 2005: 76ff; 2009b.

be international nodal points, but can also be more local or regional trading places, or administrative centres with regular markets. Imported items are always found in nodal points that were directly connected with long-distance trade, but they also occur on a smaller scale in other, even comparatively local trading places. What kind of import is found depends on the location of the particular site.

Another essential aspect to take into account when defining a Viking Age trading place is the later history of the site, that is, whether the area was used for a settlement after the Viking Age or not. Most extensively archaeologically excavated nodal points or trade centres have not been built over in later times, or the building works started in the second half of the 20th century and were preceded by archaeological excavations. When a city or town stayed in the same place after the Viking Age (e.g. Visby, Tartu, perhaps Tallinn), most of the cultural layer has probably been destroyed by later buildings.

The classification of hill-forts as trading places or non-trading places, according to how many coins have been found there, is quite questionable, too. Firstly, this is heavily dependent on excavation methods and the location of ditches; for instance, one cannot expect too many coins when the area excavated at a hill-fort mainly embraces fortifications. Secondly, the evidence of coins is often apparently inconsistent with the topographic location of hill-forts. At Iru hill-fort, for instance, which has a favourable logistical position, only two dirhams have been recorded so far, while as many as 17 dirhams have been found at the Rõuge hill-fort and settlement. Rõuge is, however, situated away from most international trade routes, as far as these can be indicated by topographical conditions, and it would be very difficult to interpret the site as the most relevant trade centre in Viking Age Estonia. A similar situation, according to Andrejs Vasks, applies to some hill-forts in northern Couronia.¹⁸⁷ Five coins, some of them imitations, have come to light at the Beltes hill-fort in the middle reaches of the comparatively large Venta River. The location of the site would be very suitable for a trading post, and the excavations there have been quite extensive. On the other hand, as many as seven coins and fragments of scales have been found in a smaller ditch one-tenth as large at the Mežīte hill-fort, whose location in the middle of the country does not seem at all indicative of such a favourable position for trade.

It is noteworthy that topographic or human geographical aspects have not played any relevant role in defining whether some Eastern Baltic hill-fort was a trading place or not. Especially in Estonia several researchers have chosen to systematically overlook topographic criteria and underestimate Viking Age trade even when the archaeological evidence clearly seems to indicate it. In

187 Vasks 2011.

Latvia and Lithuania, on the other hand, hill-forts and settlements have sometimes been classified as international trading places even when topographic conditions seem to contradict it. It is highly likely that the interpretations in all three countries have been strongly influenced by written sources, especially without differentiating between narratives depicting different periods. The archaeological evidence has been re-interpreted to match the frames created by these sources.

6.5.2 *Distribution of Silver and Trade Wares*

The shortage of Kufic coins in present-day Lithuania and a great part of Latvia seems to indicate the modest role these areas played in 9th–10th-century international communication and trade. It is difficult to believe that the shortage of dirhams can be explained by the re-casting of all the (hypothetical) silver coins into local ornaments, as has been implied by some Lithuanian researchers.¹⁸⁸ No special abundance of silver ornaments, compared with neighbouring regions, can be detected in the areas inhabited by ethnic Balts. In addition, some dirham hoards do exist, but only in particular districts (e.g. around Grobiņa and Truso), and in certain periods.

What products might have attracted Scandinavians to trade in Lithuania and Prussia, if it was not a transit route, has raised questions among several researchers, without any of them being able to offer a satisfactory answer.¹⁸⁹ Mateusz Bogucki has called the situation “the Prussian phenomenon” that has not yet been explained, even though “...in 9–11 centuries the Prussian lands were a place of great interest to the Scandinavian and Slavonic merchants and pirates, demonstrated both in archaeological and written sources”.¹⁹⁰ Why it necessarily needs to be so has not been questioned either by him or other authors. Žulkus has suggested, when talking of Palanga, that the place functioned in the Viking Age as a transit centre for trading bronze, silver, glass beads, and salt, in addition to amber and other “traditional Baltic export wares”.¹⁹¹ What the other wares were and who it was that the transit trade functioned between was not specified.

Graves with Scandinavian artefacts continued in former Prussia until the early 11th century, and the Scandinavian evidence was replaced after that by items indicating connections with the Russian princedoms in the east.¹⁹² The very modest number of coins, in comparison with other coastal areas around

188 Žulkus 2007; Bliujienė 2008.

189 Žulkus 1997: 343ff; 2007; Bogucki 2007; Bliujienė 2008.

190 Bogucki 2007: 168.

191 Žulkus 1997: 343ff.

192 Kulakov 1994: 121–123.

the Baltic Sea, seems however to indicate the insignificant role that the south-eastern coast of the Baltic played in Viking Age long-distance international trade after the mid-9th century. Scandinavian influence outside Kaup and Truso seems to be quite modest, and the whole concept of Scandinavian special interest in the region relies to a great extent on written sources. These, on the other hand, offer no detailed descriptions after the 9th century, and the assessment of Scandinavian interest towards Prussian and Lithuanian coastal areas is mainly based on the interpretation of Saxo's place names like *Samland* and *Kurland*.

6.5.3 *The Long 10th Century*

As was demonstrated in this chapter, two particular transformation periods can be identified in Viking Age communication between the east and the west: around 900 AD and around 1000 AD. Both changes seem to have been connected with the role Scandinavians played in these processes.

The role of Scandinavians in the eastern trade escalated abruptly in the turn of the 9th–10th centuries. Archaeological evidence implies that it was forced through, at least partly, by conflicts, overwhelming local power structures with violence. Although some Scandinavian bridgeheads – Staraya Ladoga and Ryurik's Gorodishche – already existed earlier, Scandinavian colonies now appeared in other parts of present-day Russia as well. The most prominent of these were Sarskoye Selo, Timerevo, and Gnëzdovo. At some point after the 860s, the earlier hill-fort of Pskov, which was similar to contemporary south Estonian hill-forts, was burnt down. The presence of Scandinavians is obvious in the 10th-century cultural layers of the later hill-fort and settlement of Pskov, as well as in adjacent cemeteries.¹⁹³ Scandinavian artefacts in the vicinity of Polotsk appeared approximately at the same time.¹⁹⁴

Staraya Ladoga and Ryurik's Gorodishche were, according to the archaeological evidence, most intensively inhabited by Scandinavians in the course of the 10th century, too. The trading place of Staraya Ladoga was fortified, and the Ljubscha hill-fort was abandoned, perhaps forcibly, in the beginning of the 10th century. The hill-fort, which archaeological evidence suggests was controlled by the locals, had probably functioned as a sort of checkpoint for the trading place.

In the Eastern Baltic, the burning of the big Iru hill-fort around 900 AD could be mentioned; after 900 the southern plateau was replaced by a much smaller but clearly more strongly fortified hill-fort on the northern plateau.

193 Beletzki 2009a, 2009b.

194 Gurevitch 1970.

It is possible that burnt layers at some other north Estonian coastal hill-forts, detected by archaeological excavations, could be dated to approximately the same time. On Saaremaa, the hill-fort of Asva was abandoned. Rādiņš has noted changes on the Daugava Way at the beginning of the 10th century, when some hill-forts were abandoned or destroyed, others got stronger fortifications. It seems likely that these changes, too, were connected with intensified Scandinavian interest in the river route, particularly due to the beginning of a Scandinavian colony at Polotsk.

The 10th century was the time of Scandinavian supremacy in *Austrvegr*; before and after that period their impact was clearly smaller, at least according to the archaeological material in present-day Russia. The Scandinavian colonies in the east lasted until the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. Starting from around 1000 AD the archaeological evidence demonstrated much less Nordic influence compared with the previous century, although the Scandinavians in Kiev-Rus were mentioned in written documents.¹⁹⁵ Most people of Scandinavian origin were probably Slavonised in course of this century,¹⁹⁶ and the number of newcomers from Nordic countries was too small to leave clear archaeological traces.

The changes in cultural landscapes around 1000 AD were described several times earlier in the text. First of all, the transformation was obvious in the abandonment of several trading centres. In the eastern Baltic these alterations, however, took place predominantly in the northern half of the region, particularly in Estonia. The changes were considerably less obvious in the other areas of the Eastern Baltic, if they occurred at all.

In Estonia, a political change can also be assumed at the turn of the 10th and the 11th centuries. The inhabitants of *Estland*, called *Chud'* in Russian chronicles, acted, according to the same chronicles, as close allies to the Scandinavian Kiev-Rus princes up to the 980s. There are indications that they, or some of them, also paid taxes to the prince residing in Staraya Ladoga or Rurik's Gorodishche, and thus probably formed part of the early political structures of *Garðaríki* (see Section 4.3.6.). It was a time when Vikings from Scandinavia, or perhaps from other areas around the northern part of the Baltic Sea, were still dominant in the area. Relations between the principedom of Novgorod and the *Chud'* became aggravated in the following decades, when the *Chud'* also seem to have stopped paying taxes.

Part of the area of present-day Estonia, probably the eastern and north-eastern parts of it, but perhaps the whole northern coast of the country, had

195 Rybina & Khvoshchinskaya 2010.

196 Melnikova 2011: 257–268.

probably been counted as part of *Garðaríki* in the 9th–10th centuries. Starting from around 1000 AD, the same area seems to have turned hostile towards Novgorod, and this led to plundering raids from the east (see Section 4.3.6.).¹⁹⁷ After that time, *Garðaríki* clearly embraced only the areas of present-day Russia, where power was being consolidated in the Kiev-Rus princedoms. The phenomenon coincides with the conversion of Prince Vladimir in 988, and with the sudden decrease of Scandinavian influence in Kiev-Rus starting from the beginning of the 11th century. At the same time the Kiev-Rus elite, which now also encompassed north-west Russia, were rapidly becoming Slavonised. Whatever *Nestor's Chronicle* stated, the Kiev princes seem to have taken over the Novgorod area, and not the other way round. All these alterations meant that the *Chud'*, at least those *Chud'* who lived in the territory of present-day Estonia now appeared in Russian chronicles as enemies.

6.6 Conclusions

The study of Viking Age processes across different periods and across the different regions of the whole eastern coast of the Baltic Sea has made it possible to present a picture of the international interplay that appeared somewhat more varied than the former, generally nation-based interpretations. Considerable attention was paid to areas that, although undeservedly, have normally been less mentioned in connection with Viking Age trade, notably the northern part of the Eastern Baltic.

The most relevant reason for the under-representation of this area in most earlier publications is probably the peculiar burial rites of the Viking Age Baltic Finns, which included neither grave goods nor tangible burial places. Since most archaeological artefacts, at least in the Eastern Baltic, still originate from graves, these burial customs have, for several researchers, created an unjustified vision of Baltic Finnic “cultural poverty”. The existence of hill-forts and settlements in the same Baltic Finnic areas, as well as abundant silver hoards in their surroundings has normally been overlooked, both in local and in foreign archaeological literature.

As for the Eastern Baltic, a sort of ethnic segregation in academic research has frequently been an essential factor influencing discussion of 9th–10th-century communication and trade routes. Researchers often consider the areas inhabited by Baltic Finns and the areas where ethnic Balts lived as two different worlds. When discussing, for instance, the Scandinavian impact

197 Ligi 1968: 38–46; Ageeva 1990: 89.

on Couronian artefactual material, the interpretation can vary according to whether the finds are only compared with other areas in Latvia and Lithuania, or with all regions on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea.

Another possible factor blurring the vision of the Viking Age in the Eastern Baltic is the time dimension. Since the general framework of the period has been mainly based on scanty written sources, narratives about the 11th–12th centuries, as well as those from the early 13th century have often simply been projected back to the 9th–10th centuries.

Archaeological evidence demonstrated increasing east Scandinavian interest towards especially the northern half of the Eastern Baltic in the 9th century. It can easily be explained by topography, and by the most important communication routes running through this area. Most of the southern areas of the Eastern Baltic were, on the other hand, characterised in the 9th–10th centuries by very individual artefactual cultures, but gradually diminishing Scandinavian interests. The only exceptions were some isolated colonies in the south-eastern corner of the Baltic, mainly around the estuary of the Vistula River.

The 10th century was the period when Vikings' interest in the eastern coasts of the sea and in the trade routes through these areas was at its height. Political and social rearrangements at the end of the century marked the rapid disappearance of Scandinavian supremacy both in the area of present-day Russia and in the Eastern Baltic. However, these processes did not happen overnight. Particularly in the first half of the 11th century, it may be possible to observe how *Svearíki*, which now had a much stronger central power, tried to re-establish its supremacy in the Eastern Baltic, at least according to some written sources.

Trade and communication routes were rearranged at the of the 11th century, although the routes known from earlier periods certainly did not disappear. Archaeological sites on the former Eastern Way, e.g. around Lake Beloye, indicate that trade between these areas and the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea intensified rather than declined in the 11th century. Still, both Kufic coins and Scandinavian artefacts disappeared from the find material.¹⁹⁸

Christianised Kiev-Rus favoured trade with Byzantium, but the Russian princedoms became more and more attractive markets themselves. As for the Eastern Baltic, these processes led to clearly diminished importance of the trade along the former *Austrvegr*, while itineraries towards the Dnepr River and the city of Kiev gained momentum. This phenomenon will be considered more closely in the last chapter of this book.

198 Makarov 2004.

Between Consolidating States: The Eastern Baltic Areas in the 11th and 12th Centuries

The period 1000–1200 AD was the richest in archaeological finds in the Eastern Baltic. Most conspicuous was the change, compared with earlier periods, in the area inhabited by Livs, as well as in present-day Estonia, where only a few burials were known from the 9th–10th centuries. The 11th–12th-century burials tended to be full of grave goods everywhere on the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea. It was not only that graves were characterised by abundant finds, but bigger and more powerful hill-forts were also built, and several large settlement sites recorded from the last centuries of prehistory in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic. The same is true for most areas inhabited by ethnic Balts, with the only difference that in these regions plentiful archaeological evidence had also characterised previous periods.

Another obvious characteristic of the 11th–12th centuries is the increased cultural impact of the Russian princedoms on the Eastern Baltic, a process that was likely to have been linked to political ambitions. Nevertheless, overseas interaction with Scandinavian countries, where there were now also states with consolidated royal power, did not disappear, but apparently diminished. Close connections between Estonian islands and coastal areas and eastern Sweden, particularly Gotland, were clearly indicated as late as the chronicles from the first decades of the 13th century.

Present-day Finland, Estonia, and Latvia remained throughout most of these centuries as a kind of stateless buffer zone between consolidated Christian powers in the east and the west, while 11th–12th-century Lithuania was characterised by incipient state-making processes.¹ The estates of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania remained, however, in inland areas and were in the 11th–12th centuries only indirectly connected with overseas communication around the Baltic Sea. The state formation of Lithuania is, therefore, not treated in the present overview. Neither will Christianisation and the Baltic crusades that had their beginning in the 12th century be discussed here. These subjects are

1 Kuncėvičius 2000a; Nikžentaitis 2001.

very voluminous and specific, and have been thoroughly studied by several historians comparatively recently.²

7.1 Interaction with Scandinavian Kingdoms

Not only archaeological evidence, but also written sources are more abundant from the 11th century onwards, and issues connected with different areas in the Eastern Baltic appear more frequently in documents. A number of these writings seem to indicate struggles between Russian princedoms and Scandinavian kingdoms for politically influential zones in the Eastern Baltic. The competition resulted in crusades and the conquest of most Eastern Baltic areas, as well as the incorporation of this region into the Christian Western European cultural sphere in the course of the 13th century.

7.1.1 *Swedish Struggle to Retain Its Dominion in the Eastern Baltic*

As was demonstrated in Chapter 6, the direct cultural impact of eastern Vikings on Kiev-Rus princedoms diminished considerably at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. Most colonies established by Scandinavians in the area of present-day Russia ceased to exist at the beginning of the 11th century, and mutual contacts that to some degree re-intensified in the first half of the 11th century can predominantly be described as link-ups between different dynasties and their members. The changes, however, did not happen completely overnight. Nordic sagas and other documents describing events in the first half of the 11th century frequently refer to Scandinavians in Russia, as well as to representatives of Russian princely dynasties in the new-born states in Scandinavia.

Vladimir the Great, who ruled Kiev-Rus at the turn of the millennia, spent some time in exile in Norway at the end of the 10th century, while at home both he and his successor Yaroslav the Wise counted on Scandinavian mercenaries to consolidate their political power. The representatives of Russian dynasties married several members of Scandinavian or Western European royal and other high-ranking families. As for written sources, even more than before persons of Scandinavian origin and active in Kiev-Rus appear with names in the 11th century. However, the archaeological evidence suggests that their numbers were in reality too small to leave clear traces, as had been common with 10th-century eastern Vikings.

2 Christiansen 1997; Lind *et al.* 2004.

7.1.1.1 The First Viking Expedition of Prince Óláf

In late summer or early autumn 1007, the 12-year-old boy Óláf Haraldson, later Norwegian king Óláf the Holy, sailed on his first Viking raid. According to *Heimskringla*, the campaign proceeded first along the eastern Swedish coast up to Sigtuna. The saga did not mention marauding actions in the Danish realms, but, after passing these areas, the Swedish lands were plundered.³

And toward fall he sailed east to Sweden and there began to harry and burn all the countryside, for he thought he had good cause to repay the Swedes for having deprived his father of life.

The Swedish king Óláf Skötkonung tried to entrap the plunderer at Lake Mälaren, but the young Viking succeeded in slipping away with all his fleet and sailed on to Gotland. Gotlandic peasants offered to pay scat, which was accepted by the Viking prince, who also decided to winter on the island. Next spring, in 1008, the king-to-be continued his expedition to Saaremaa, and from there to Finland.⁴

Here we are told that as soon as spring arrived, King Óláf sailed east to *Eysýsla* to harry. He went up on land, but the men of *Eysýsla* came down to the shore and fought with them. King Óláf was victorious there, he pursued them, harried, and devastated the land. We are told that at first, when King Óláf arrived in *Eysýsla*, the farmers offered to pay tribute. But when they arrived with the tribute he marched against them with his troops fully armed; and then it turned out otherwise than the farmers had expected; for they had come down to the shore, not with the tribute, but rather, all armed, and gave battle to the king, as was told before.

After another battle in Finland Óláf returned to Denmark, where he allied himself with the influential Dane Thorkel, and together they annihilated a group of Vikings, who, according to the chronicler “...always were at sea and commanded a large force, had themselves called kings though they had no lands to rule”.⁵

An interesting aspect in the narrative is how Prince Óláf chose regions to be plundered. As was pointed out at the beginning of the story, he attacked Swedish dominions, which apparently included not only Gotland but also Saaremaa

3 Saint Óláf's Saga, 5.

4 Saint Óláf's Saga, 7–8. For the Finnish part, see Section 4.2.5.

5 Saint Óláf's Saga, 9.

and Finland. Other areas in the Eastern Baltic, as well as areas subordinate to the Danish king were apparently avoided.

The *History of Norway* offers a somewhat different version of what is probably the same expedition. According to it, Ólaf used Novgorod as his base, and arranged several raids from there to Saaremaa, Gotland, Öland, and Couronia.⁶

In those times Olaf, son of Haraldr the Grenlander, was held in high esteem in Russia. Because he was dispossessed of his native land, he had to turn to piracy. He usually wintered in a town, which we call *Hólmgarðr*, attended by his numerous fleet. In summer he constantly harassed all the peoples round *Mare Balticum* [the Baltic Sea] with raiding and ravaging. He utterly laid waste the large and populous island of *Eysýsla*, and so harried two others equal to it in size and population, namely *Gotland* and *Eyland*, that their inhabitants paid enormous sums in tribute throughout the time he stayed in Russia. In the country of *Curi* [Couronians] he inflicted no small slaughter on them, crowned with most glorious success.

This version suggests that, in addition to the districts mentioned before, Couronia could also be counted as a Swedish dominion. It is interesting to note that, as stated in the *History of Norway*, Ólaf wintered in Novgorod (*Hólmgarðr*) with all his ships, which is, considering the location of this city, hard to believe.⁷ The base of Ólaf's navy may originally have been at some other place, which, accepting that he commanded numerous ships, was probably somewhere on the coast and perhaps even outside the present territory of Russia.

If Ólaf really resided in Novgorod it could easily explain why he is never said to have attacked *Garðaríki*, but only this part of the Eastern Baltic that belonged to the Swedish zone of influence. It would be an exaggeration to suggest direct political subordination but it is probably not quite accidental, that around 1075 Adam of Bremen was possibly referring to Estonia (*Aestland*) as one of the Swedish "islands".⁸ Even as late as 1123 Estonia (*Hestia*), together with Finland (*Findia*) were mentioned in *Nomina insularum de regno Sueuorum* as Swedish provinces in the east.⁹

6 A History of Norway, 23: 20–31; the text somewhat changed according to Drevneskandinavskiy istochniki, 70–71.

7 See also comment in Drevneskandinavskiy istochniki, 70–71.

8 Adam of Bremen, 4:17.

9 Blomkvist 2005b:577–578 and references; 2009a.

7.1.1.2 King Ólaf Skötkonung's Problems with His Overseas Countries

The struggle for dominions around the northern half of the Baltic Sea in the early 11th century appears even clearer from events that took place a decade later. Peasants, who formed an influential power in early medieval Sweden, demanded positive action from their king Ólaf Skötkonung in an Uppsala *Thing* that took place around 1017. The king was accused of a war between Sweden and Norway and, what is most interesting in the context here, of allowing his scat-lands in the east to be lost to him and to Sweden. The threat was to be taken seriously, and, although the peasants also offered possible solutions, the king was threatened with death if he did not take any of the actions demanded.¹⁰

Thorgný [who represented the peasants] spoke as follows: "Different is now the disposition of the Swedish kings from what it was before. Thorgný, my father's father, remembered Eirík Emundarson, king in Uppsala, and related this about him that when he was in his best years he had a levy every summer and proceeded to various lands, subjecting to his sway *Finnland* and *Kirjálaland*, *Estland* and *Kúrland* and wide reaches of other lands in the east. And one may still see the fortifications and other great works which he made [there] ... Thorgný, my father, was a long time with King Bjorn, and he knew his way of dealing with men. And while Bjorn lived his dominion flourished and in nowise decreased ... I myself can remember King Eirík the Victorious, for I was with him in many warlike expeditions. He increased the dominion of the Swedes and defended it valiantly...

...But the king whom we now have lets no one presume to talk to him except about what he himself wants done; and on that alone he is intent, but lets lands tributary to him defect from him through his lack of energy and enterprise. He has the ambition to keep the dominion of Norway in his power which no other Swedish king ever coveted before, and that causes trouble to many. Now it is the will of us farmers that you make peace with Ólaf the Stout, the king of Norway, and give him your daughter Ingegerd in marriage. Now if you intend to regain those lands in the east which your kinsmen and forbears have possessed there, then we shall all follow your leadership to do so. But if you will not do as we say, we shall set upon you and kill you, and not tolerate from you lawlessness and hostility."

10 Saint Ólaf's Saga, 80.

Ólaf Skötkonung indeed promised to marry his daughter Ingegerd to the Norwegian king Ólaf. However, as a result of following events, the princess got married to the prince of Kiev-Rus Yaroslav the Wise instead, while her sister Astrid became the wife of Norwegian Ólaf. Ingegerd demanded in the course of the negotiations of the marriage contract, which took place in 1019, that Staraya Ladoga should be her bride-gift. Yaroslav agreed gladly, at least according to the saga.¹¹ By the beginning of the 11th century Novgorod had developed into the new centre of north-west Russia, and Staraya Ladoga was quickly losing its importance as an international trading post. Archaeological data indicate that the presence of Scandinavians in Staraya Ladoga diminished rapidly in the same period.¹² Ingegerd's demand can be interpreted as an attempt to hold on to the former trade centre and entrance to the mighty Novgorod, which was clearly slipping out of the hands of the Swedes at this time.

The princess's wish was fulfilled, but the heyday of Staraya Ladoga was over anyway. Even if it was still important in 1019, it lost its relevance soon after. The decline of the place was indicated, among other things, by the fact that the real rule of Staraya Ladoga was transferred to Jarl Ragnvald, who was banished from the Swedish state by the same Ólaf Skötkonung, and who could, therefore, only be loyal to Yaroslav, not Ólaf.

There is no indication in *Saint Ólaf's Saga* whether Ólaf Skötkonung fulfilled the other demand of the Swedish peasants, namely to renew the subordination of the former scat-lands in the east. The list of countries as it was presented in the saga directly reflects the area of the Viking Age shared warrior culture of Swedish Vikings and (mainly) Baltic Finnic seafarers in the northern half of the Baltic Rim, and may, therefore, be true, at least according to the archaeological evidence and topography (see Chapters 5–6). It is less likely, though, that Thorgný's father and grandfather could remember these "conquests" and the kings named in the saga. These details seem to have been added later by the story-teller. Ólaf Skötkonung was apparently not a particularly beloved and appreciated king. Only a few years after the events described above, his son Onund was elected to rule as a king together with King Ólaf. As for the promise to take care of the eastern scat-lands, one can refer to some paragraphs in another saga, namely in the *Saga of Yngvar the Traveller*. It talks of events that happened at the beginning of the 11th century as well.

In 1020 or 1021, thus only some years after the *Thing* in Uppsala, Ólaf Skötkonung sent his son Onund, who at this time was still only a prince approximately 12 years old, to a land called *Seimgalir* that was located somewhere in

11 Saint Ólaf's Saga, 95.

12 Duczko 2004: 86–96; Pushkina 2004.

the east. Onund set off with his friend Yngvar, and their mission was to force the local chieftains in *Seimgalir* to pay taxes to the Swedish crown.¹³

When those kinsmen, Onund and Yngvar were in the prime of their youth, there was a dispute between King Olaf and that people who are called *Seimgalir*, and they had not paid tax for some time. Then King Olaf sent Onund and Yngvar with three ships to demand tribute.

They reach land and call a meeting with the inhabitants, and there they demanded tribute from their king. Yngvar demonstrated his great skill in speaking there, so that the king and many other chiefs saw no choice but to pay the tax which was demanded, all except three chiefs who did not want to follow the king's advice and refused to pay the tax and raised an army.

But when the king heard what they were up to, he asked Onund and Yngvar to fight them and gave them troops. They fought, and there was great loss of life there before they put the chiefs to flight. In the rout, the chief who had most opposed the paying of tribute was taken captive, and they hanged him, but the other two got away. They took much booty there and claimed all the tributes, and, that done, they sailed back to King Olaf and brought him a great wealth of gold and silver and good treasures.

Semgallia, which, moreover, is an inland district, is not mentioned in other Nordic sagas (although it cannot be excluded that the district was sometimes mentioned under the name *Samland*, see the story of Vidgaut the Merchant in Section 7.1.2.1.) and it was not named in the list of Swedish dominions either. It is possible, therefore, that some other district in the Eastern Baltic was meant, labelled with the unusual name *Seimgalir*, for instance Saaremaa or Couronia (see discussion in Section 4.2.10.). The inhabitants of the early medieval Nordic countries most probably did not possess exact information about different districts in the Eastern Baltic. Whatever district we are dealing with here, one thing seems to be clear: King Ólaf did take some action to recover his scatlands, exactly as was demanded in the *Thing* in 1017.

7.1.2 *Austurveg-Men and Christians from the West*

The sagas also hint at plundering raids from the east in 11th-century Denmark. King Magnus the Good said, according to *Heimskringla*, in the 1040s:¹⁴

¹³ Saga of Ingvar the Traveller, 4.

¹⁴ The Saga of Magnús the Good, 23.

But as you know, all Danes have this summer sworn allegiance to me, and now the land will be without a ruler when I leave it. But as you know also it is much exposed to incursions of the Wends [*Vindi*], Kurlanders [*Kuri*] and other tribes along the Baltic, as well as of Saxons.

In the 1070s, Denmark still seems to have suffered under eastern attacks. This activity was, according to saga-tellers, stopped only during the reign of Knut the Holy.¹⁵

King Knut was a strict and powerful ruler, who punished evildoers with great severity. During the reign of Harald Whetstone, however, there had been little in the way of punishment for outrages committed either by the Danes themselves, or by Vikings plundering in Denmark, such as Courlanders [*Kúrir*] and others from *Austrvegr*. After Knut came to power he defended the land fiercely and drove all the heathen not only from his land but from the very seas; so that because of Knut's authority and strength of arms, no Viking would dare lie off the coast of Denmark.

Saxo tells us that the king-to-be Knut fought against the eastern Vikings as early as in his youth (in late 1050s and 1060s?), when he had forced the hazardous pirates "quite to their knees", and with that completely subdued both Sembi-ans and Estonians (*Sembicis atque Estonicis*).¹⁶ When Knut later came to power (reigned 1082–1086) he continued this fight and "annihilated" the Couronians', Sembi-ans', and Estonians' lands (*Curorum, Sembonumque ac Estonum funditus regna*).¹⁷

After Harald's death Cnut was recalled, with the approval of his brothers, to take the most exalted position in the kingdom; while he was in exile he had again entered upon the war against the Easterners which he had begun in early manhood and, having once accepted the throne, he turned his attention to renewing those hostilities with all his might, more with a view to extending the Christian faith than to satisfying his greed; with the improvement of his fortunes he also wished to secure increased renown. Nor did he withdraw his hand from that venture until the dominions of the Kurlanders, Samlanders, and Estlanders had been totally put down.

15 Knytlinga Saga, 29.

16 Saxo Grammaticus, 11.8.

17 Saxo Grammaticus, 11.11.1.

What areas Knut actually might have attacked, and how far his “annihilation” reached, remains, however, uncertain. It is similarly uncertain whether he really did it mainly to spread the Christian faith; at least, there are no clear signs of Christianity in the late 11th-century Eastern Baltic.

It was not only kings but also other chieftains who took up expeditions against the 11th-century eastern coasts of the Baltic. A good example is Jarl Eirik, the brother of the Danish king Knut:¹⁸

Earl Eirik was a strong and popular chieftain, always having with him a large company of retainers. He sailed on Viking expeditions to *Austrvegr* fighting against the heathen, but allowed all Christians and merchants to go in peace wherever they might wish. For this reason he was renowned and popular throughout *Austrvegr* and everyone of importance knew his name. He journeyed all the way east to *Garðaríki*, visiting the homes of chieftains and other great men all of whom welcomed him with friendship and respect, and he received fine gifts from powerful leaders.

The political situation between the eastern and western coasts of the Baltic seems to have stabilised to some degree at the very end of the 11th and the first half of the 12th centuries. Political organisations in the countries around the Eastern Baltic had developed, markedly reducing the importance of the plundering economy in these states. In the 12th century, the kingdoms in the west were busy with internal fights and military campaigns against their closest neighbours. The Viking raids that had earlier played an unavoidable role in gaining status for young men of higher social rank were gradually replaced by more centrally organised military expeditions, frequently with the objective of conquering new territories. Random plundering raids undertaken by particular chieftains remained the preserve of the coastal people in the Eastern Baltic.

Written sources indicate increasing military activity between the Eastern Baltic and Scandinavia towards the end of the 12th century, when the still pagan Eastern Baltic became the target of a Christian mission. Religious arguments, however, quite often seem to have intermingled with more practical ones in the renewed expeditions to the Eastern Baltic. The story of a campaign to Norway that was undertaken by the Danish king Valdemar I in 1160 can serve as an example. After the Danes encountered passive resistance in Norway when local peasants refused to be summoned to a *Thing* called by the Danish king, Valdemar announced his decision to leave Norway and attack heathens instead. The king said: “It is more my inclination to go with the army to *Austrvegr*

18 Knytlinga Saga, 70.

against the heathens, of whom we have enough before us in *Austrvegr*, than to kill Christian people here, although they have well deserved it".¹⁹ According to the narrative the Danish navy did not in fact attack the Eastern Baltic after this declaration but simply sailed back home to Denmark.

Some Viking-style expeditions to the Eastern Baltic were carried out even as late as the second half of the 12th century. That these raids could be profitable is obvious from the following paragraph in the *Saga of Sverri*, talking of the year 1185:²⁰

He [Norwegian prince Eirik] had a large company, and as he was liberal to his men and had small revenues, his money fell short. The following winter he prepared to leave the country and sail to *Austrvegr* to plunder heathen lands. Many of the King's troops entered his service for this voyage, and he had five ships ... In the summer they sailed on *Austrvegr* to *Estland* and plundered *Vikar* and *Tunta*, and seized much booty. Then they turned back to Gotland, and having quarrelled with the Saxons, won two cogs from them and took immense wealth. Thence they sailed to Sweden...

It is obvious from the narrative that *Estland* was still situated in *Austrvegr* at the end of the 12th century. The place name *Vikar* could possibly refer to the western coast of Estonia, called *Vik* only some decades later. The toponym *Tunta* does not occur in other sources.

7.1.2.1 Pirates from *Kúrland* and *Estland*

It is a widespread view in Eastern Baltic history writing that the pirates from this region became particularly active in the 12th century, when, on the other hand, the Scandinavian plundering activity in the Baltic Sea diminished considerably. This may or may not be true. We should take into account the character and quantity of written sources – the number of documents where Eastern Baltic peoples were described was many times higher in the 12th-early 13th centuries than before. The stabilising power of kings such as characterised the Scandinavian states was without doubt a factor in diminishing expeditions in free Viking style – the kings were certainly not interested in the independent and uncontrollable activity of warrior gangs, even when most of their raids took place outside the borders of their own states. It was also the time

19 The Saga of Magnús Erlingsson, 27.

20 Sverissaga, 113.

when all kings made efforts to strengthen the defence of their own coasts.²¹ The Scandinavian areas were better protected than before, which most likely also diminished the plundering raids carried out by sea-faring plunderers from the eastern coast of the sea.

The most often mentioned Eastern Baltic pirates were the Couronians and the inhabitants of Saaremaa. Presumably they mainly threatened coastal areas around their own waters, that is, in the eastern part of the sea, while expeditions to Scandinavia were embarked on only rarely. Indirect references to their activity in their own waters can be found in contracts mentioned in early-13th-century written sources. There were, for instance, contracts between Saaremaa and Gotland, later also between the Saaremaa inhabitants and the Danes, which seem to have guaranteed free passage of ships of one partner through waters under the control of the other partner.²² We know that the subjects of such contracts could feel themselves safe even when returning from a plundering expedition and landing in the harbours of the other partner.

All ships sailing over the Baltic near Gotland and bound for the Daugava route or the Gulf of Finland had to pass the coasts of Saaremaa or northern Kurzeme. Early-13th-century non-aggression treaties suggest that the seafarers of Saaremaa who controlled the trade routes mentioned above formed a real threat to early medieval trade. Most probably they collected scat from foreign ships sailing through these waters and when it was not paid, attacked them. Written sources suggest that both Saaremaa people and Couronians were active in trade posts in the Eastern Baltic and elsewhere, for not only trade and barter, but also for selling slaves and other booty from their expeditions.

A situation that can occur when a ship sailed alone near the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea is well described in the following story that probably took place in the 1120s:²³

There was a man called Vidgaut whose family belonged to *Sámlandi*. He was heathen at the time. He was a very wealthy merchant, a man of great ability, and he used regularly to sail on trading voyages to *Austrvegr*.

One summer when he was intending to sail back home from the east, it happened that he was late in getting ready. When he was west off *Kúrland*, the *Kúrir* were waiting for him with their warships and made tracks for him at once, meaning to kill him and steal his cargo. Since he had only

21 E.g. Knytlinga Saga, 86.

22 Henricus Lettus, VI:2; XXX:1; for other and similar contracts in the 11th–13th centuries, see Blomkvist 2009b.

23 Knytlinga Saga, 87.

a single ship and *Kúrir* a large fleet, he realized that he stood no chance against them, so he tried to get away and sail back home to *Sámland*. *Kúrir* sailed close behind him and forced him towards the open sea hoping to get his life and property. He saw that he had only two choices, either to risk facing them no matter what the outcome, or turn in the direction of the Christian countries. He thought neither choice was a good one, but decided to make for the open sea and set course westward for Denmark.

...so he sailed to Hedeby and met Lord Knut there.

...Vidgaut and his men berthed their ship, then went to see Knut. The duke asked them who they were and Vidgaut gave his name, adding that they were from *Sámland*. "I have heard of you", said the duke, "and I'm told that you must be heathen people". "We're heathens all right", replied Vidgaut.

[...followed by how Vidgaut let himself and his crew to be baptised. The paragraph ends with:]

He [Knut] and Vidgaut often talked together and the duke found his conversation very agreeable. He had a lot to talk about, for he was an intelligent man and widely travelled. The duke asked him many questions about *Austrvegr* and Vidgaut was able to tell him much that he wanted to know.

The story-teller added in the following paragraph that Vidgaut was a well-known man, a good speaker who could speak several languages, and did not need a translator when talking with the "king" of Novgorod.²⁴ Unlike the sagastories of events that probably happened earlier, the differences between languages seem to have become a pronounced problem in the 12th century. Still, the narrative tells us that Vidgaut came from a country that remained outside the Viking Age shared warrior culture, which might also explain why knowledge of a common language was not so obvious in his case.

The narrative of Vidgaut deserves attention because *Kúrland* and *Sámland* appear in it as two clearly different or even antagonistic areas, while *Sámland* is clearly located outside *Austrvegr*. It is also interesting to note the detail in the story that the Couronians could cut off Vidgaut's way back home and forced him to sail to the open sea instead, which seems to imply that *Sámland*, at least in this narrative, was Sengallia, and not the Sambia peninsula further south. The distance between the northern end of the Kurzeme peninsula and the southernmost coast of Saaremaa is less than 30 km. It was probably possible to block a ship from sailing through this strait towards the Bay of Riga, where

24 Knytlinga Saga, 88.

one could continue to Semgallia along the River Lielupe. When the strait was blocked, the only possibility for Vidgaut was to escape towards the open sea in the west. On the other hand, it is topographically difficult to imagine how Vidgaut's ship could be hindered from sailing to the Sambia peninsula.

The written sources suggest that by the early 13th century the seafarers from Saaremaa and Couronia represented the most powerful maritime forces in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea. The situation was presumably already the same in earlier centuries, for which the number of written sources available to us is much more limited. The topographic location of Saaremaa and Couronia, on the other hand, was not very suitable for the establishment of relevant nodal points connected with international trade networks. Saaremaa was an island close to the mainland, and there were no really big rivers or other useful routes starting from Couronia.²⁵

7.1.2.2 Defeat in *Blekinge*

Quite a number of writings in the second half of the 12th century talk about pirates from the east who threatened the coasts of medieval Sweden and Denmark. These descriptions indicate cooperation between the seafarers from Saaremaa (or coastal Estonia in general) and Couronia, which is frequently closer than one might expect from (presumably) two different ethnicities. A battle between Danes and Couronians in 1170 serves here as a good example. The event has been described in two sources: *Knytlinga Saga* and the book of Saxo Grammaticus.

Couronians were ravaging in Blekinge (in present-day south Sweden, but part of Denmark when it happened), and a Danish fleet went to find them.²⁶

When they were at sea in their warships, they heard that *Kúrir* had taken their troops by sea and attacked Blekinge. Though they were not sure that this was true, they decided something would have to be done, and the plan they adopted was that Kristoforus, Bishop Absalon and Asbjorn should set out in that direction and sail to Öland, where they seized both goods and men. When they got back to their ships, they heard that *Kúrir* were at *Mön*, so they set free the prisoners they had taken, headed straight for where *Kúrir* were, and came on them at a harbour called *Jarnloka*.

When *Kúrir* realised that troops were heading towards them they hauled their ships ashore and prepared to make a stand there. They thought these were Swedes but an old man amongst *Kúrir* said they were

²⁵ Mägi 2011a.

²⁶ *Knytlinga Saga*, 123.

Danes. “And it’s not a good idea to wait”, he said. At that he rowed off in his ship, but the rest of *Kúrir* stayed behind with nine ships. Then Kristoforus and his companions came with all their men, and immediately began to attack: all *Kúrir* were killed there and not even a single child escaped, while only two of the Danes were killed. Then the Danes took their ships and goods and brought them home, having won a great victory.

The harbour called *Jarnloka* where the Couronians sailed was probably Möre on the Swedish mainland coast opposite to Öland.²⁷ It is interesting to note the detail that in the beginning the Couronians thought that the approaching ships were Swedish. This detail seems technically unnecessary for the narrative – because why should the Couronians be more afraid of Danes than Swedes? It could, however, hint at the possibility that the Swedes and the Couronians had some treaty or other kind of connection, so that the Couronians did not expect an attack from the approaching Swedish fleet. This is only reinforced by the fact that nothing was said about the Couronians plundering in the Swedish dominions, e.g. Öland.

The same story is told by Saxo, with some minor but interesting differences.²⁸ First of all, according to Saxo the pirates were Couronians and Estonians. It suggests that the united activity of Couronians and Estonians was either a commonplace, or these two ethnonyms overlapped, at least for Saxo. As was typical of Saxo’s strongly Christian attitudes, he lets the Danes avoid ravaging Öland because of Christianity there, despite the state of war between Denmark and Sweden. One (Estonian) ship’s departure was also mentioned by Saxo, without further explanation but noting, however, that they did not warn the others.

Common activity of Couronians and Estonians, particularly the inhabitants of Saaremaa, appears in the same way in the chronicle of Henry the Livonian from the first quarter of the 13th century. Although he often uses the term Estonians as well, he makes it clear, however, that those carrying out several expeditions with the Couronians in most cases were warriors from Saaremaa.²⁹ In 1203 inhabitants from Saaremaa plundered in Lister in medieval Denmark,³⁰ and in 1210 some Couronian ships attacked German pilgrims near Gotland when the latter were on their way back home from Livonia.³¹ Saaremaa warriors were ravaging in Scandinavia even as late as 1226, when the majority of

²⁷ Blomkvist 2005a.

²⁸ Saxo Grammaticus, 14.40.

²⁹ E.g. Henricus Lettus, VII:1.

³⁰ Henricus Lettus, VII:1–2.

³¹ Henricus Lettus, XIV:1–3.

medieval Livonia (but not Saaremaa) were officially Christianised.³² These events, however, were mentioned only incidentally, that is, only in cases when the crusaders were included. The situation was briefly summarised by Henry the Livonian with the sentence “...both Estonians and Couronians had the habit of plundering the Swedish and Danish coasts”.³³

The text of Henry the Livonian indicates that he made a distinction between Couronians and the inhabitants of Saaremaa (*Osilians*) but these were ethnicities who closely cooperated. For example, the Saaremaa pirates used to sell on to the Couronians, according to Henry, women captured by their expeditions.³⁴ It is, nevertheless, possible to assume that the term *kuri*, which originally designated pirate or seafarer, had been the source of the names of both Couronia and Saaremaa (considering its earlier name *Kuresaar*, *Kuri-Island*), while later it became attached simply to Couronia and its inhabitants (see in detail 4.2.8.–4.2.10.).

Medieval writers were probably confused or did simply not know where exactly in the east the plunderers came from, but their activity defined them as *kuri/kurir* or Couronians anyway. The name was perhaps particularly used by Danes, considering that both Saxo Grammaticus and the *Knyttlinga Saga* mentioned them more often than other sources, while they seem not to have heard anything of Saaremaa, which was so often mentioned elsewhere. As pointed out above, it is also possible that the expeditions of Couronians, both from Couronia and Saaremaa, were really predominantly directed against Danish dominions (for archaeological indicators, see 6.2.8.).

7.1.2.3 Attack on Sigtuna

However, there is one expedition to the very core of the medieval Swedish state that often has been connected with Estonian and Couronian seafarers, although without clear evidence. In 1187 the contemporary “capital” of Sweden, Sigtuna, seems to have been burnt down and plundered. The event has, unfortunately, not been described in any Nordic saga, let alone contemporary documents. Despite this, the burning of Sigtuna has sometimes, especially by some Estonian and Russian authors, been presented as a most relevant event in the 12th century Baltic politics.³⁵

Researchers mostly agree that the event really happened, but the question is who caused it and how extensive was the damage. Closest to 1187 are the

32 Henricus Lettus, XXX:1.

33 Henricus Lettus, VII:1.

34 Henricus Lettus, XXX:1.

35 For overview of earlier opinions Schück 1953; Rebas 2007.

Annals of Visby, where it was mentioned briefly that Sigtuna had been burnt down by heathens. The next reference can only be found in the *Eric Chronicle* from the 1320s, where Karelians were mentioned as the offenders. In their 16th-century chronicles, the brothers Petri as well as Johannes Magnus accused Estonians of burning down Sigtuna.³⁶

Olaus Petri, who wrote his *Swedish Chronicle* in the 1540s, used several written sources that do not exist anymore; several of them probably burnt in the great fire at the royal palace in Stockholm in 1697. Among other documents, he also readily made use of the *Eric Chronicle*, but not for the description of how Sigtuna was burnt down. For this, he obviously decided to rely on some other sources. The reliability of the *Eric Chronicle* is normally considered to be not very high. It reflected a period when Sweden was in conflict with Russia, and therefore also with Karelia, which formed part of Russia. To justify attacks in the 14th century, the chronicler may have been influenced by a wish to recall the danger from Karelians and Russians in earlier times, that is, in the late 12th century. Since Olaus Petri, on the other hand, is considered to be trustworthy, several researchers have chosen to believe his version about the Sigtuna attack.³⁷

Olaus claimed that Estonians “burnt down Sigtuna Anno Domini 1187” and later killed Jarl Johannes in Askasnä. The jarl’s widow destroyed the Estonians in revenge at a place “that is now called *eesta skär*”. The story continued with another victory by Estonians, namely how Saaremaa warriors attacked the Swedish garrison at Lihula in 1220 and killed all the men there.³⁸ Enn Tarvel has suggested that the *eesta skär* was probably a hill that is nowadays called Estbröte.³⁹

The most convincing argument against accepting the version naming the Karelians and Russians as those attacking Sigtuna is that the event was not mentioned in Russian chronicles. Sofia Cathedral in Novgorod possesses richly decorated doors, defined by tradition as “the gates of Sigtuna”, but they actually originate from present-day Poland and from a clearly later period. It is hard to believe that the Novgorod chronicles, which write about several expeditions of the Novgorodians, but also about Karelians and other people who were to some degree dependent on Novgorod, for some unknown reason remained silent about a victory such as the ravaging and burning of the most relevant town of Sweden might have been. The relationship with Sweden was quite tense in

36 Rebas 2007; Tarvel 2007.

37 Rebas 2007 and references.

38 Rebas 2007 and references.

39 Tarvel 2007.

the second half of the 12th century, and Swedish attacks against the estates of Novgorod, e.g. their attack on Ladoga in 1164, have certainly been mentioned in the chronicles.⁴⁰ Still, the year 1187 was described at some length, but this description consisted mainly of very local events. In the following year, that is, in 1188, the Novgorod chronicle wrote about their merchants on Gotland, who had been plundered, which naturally caused a great quarrel.⁴¹ It is, however, very hard to see this event as connected with the hypothetical attack of the Karelians against Sigtuna.⁴² On the contrary, Novgorod and its allies seem not to have had anything to do with the burning of the Swedish town.

Another essential argument is that Karelians, and even less Novgorodians, were not normally described as pirates in other written sources (except Saxo's first nine books, see Sections 4.2.3.–4.2.4.). Hain Rebas has even doubted whether the Novgorodian and Karelian ships were able to sail from Lake Ladoga to Sigtuna because of their constructional characteristics.⁴³ The Russian chronicles did not talk of spectacular naval expeditions by Novgorodians either, although merchants and sometimes even princes visiting overseas countries were mentioned. It is not a valid argument that the Novgorodians and Karelians used ships to attack the *Yem*-people, probably inhabitants of Häme, since this most probably did not require sailing on the open sea, if on the Baltic Sea at all (see Section 7.3.4.).

Peoples along the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea had, in contrast to the Karelians, definitely both ships and the capacity to sail to Sigtuna. The burning of this town can be considered just one event among different campaigns from both sides. As was mentioned above, Jarl Erik's big expedition to *Estland* had taken place only some years before what happened in Sigtuna, that is, in 1185 (see Section 7.1.2.). Although Erik was a Danish prince, he sailed, after having plundered on Estonian coasts, to the Swedish king, who probably resided somewhere in Middle Sweden, perhaps even in Sigtuna. Some researchers have suggested that the attack on Sigtuna can be seen as revenge for Erik's expedition.⁴⁴

As for the town of Sigtuna, its burning and destruction in 1187 is not really proved by archaeological methods. No layer of burnt buildings or anything else relating to a devastating attack has so far been uncovered in Sigtuna, even though the town has been excavated extensively. Sigtuna kept its position in the

40 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1164 (6672).

41 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1188 (6696).

42 See also Schück 1953.

43 Rebas 2007.

44 Rebas 2007.

course of the following century, and lost it gradually only after that period.⁴⁵ We can assume that “the burning of Sigtuna” was probably just another stage in the mutual plundering raids, which was probably emotionally significant for those directly engaged in it and was therefore covered in the chronicles, although its relevance for trade or politics was apparently much smaller. It is, therefore, ultimately not so relevant which district on the eastern coast of the Baltic the plunderers actually came from.

7.1.3 *The Beginning of Crusades*

The still pagan Eastern Baltic became the target of Christian missions starting from the second half of the 12th century. The Danish state seems to have had an initiating role in this, although some researchers have also underlined the interests of the Swedish crown.⁴⁶ While Sweden arranged crusades mainly to Finland, Denmark seems to have been primarily interested in the Eastern Baltic areas, especially those controlling international trade routes. The only known exception is a Danish crusade to Finland in 1191.⁴⁷

Henry the Livonian mentions a Danish campaign to the Eastern Baltic around 1197, led probably by the Swedish Jarl Birger Brosa.⁴⁸ The jarl's target was *Kúrland*, but his fleet was driven by a violent storm to Virumaa in north Estonia instead, where they plundered for three days but, to the great disappointment of Henry the Chronicler, did not proceed to convert the locals to the Christian faith.⁴⁹ Danish chronicles mention a campaign to Estonia at approximately the same time, leaving it thus open whether there actually were two campaigns more or less at the same time, or whether the sources are recording a single trip that was connected with both the Swedish and the Danish crowns.⁵⁰

It is likely that in the year 1197 the Scandinavians sailed over the Baltic in the vicinity of Gotland, but were forced to turn towards the north-east because of strong winds. In all probability they were originally bound for northern Couronia or perhaps even Saaremaa, if we assume that the inhabitants of Saaremaa might also have been called *Curones* in earlier times. Henry the Livonian described the event in his chronicle as something that had happened before his arrival to Livonia, and that he had therefore relied on some other documents

45 Tesch 1996; Ros 2009.

46 Blomkvist 2009a.

47 Tarvel 1994.

48 Henricus Lettus, I:13.

49 Henricus Lettus, I:13.

50 Blomkvist 2005a, 2005b:210–214.

or just on oral tradition. On the northern coast of Estonia, the Scandinavians did not attack the area around *Rafala* (later Tallinn) but continued further east along the north-western Estonian coast. The reasons for this might have been political – for instance the Danish king might have had some sort of contract with *Rafala*, as seems to be hinted at by the events of 1219 when the Danish navy could in the first instance land at *Lindanise* without any resistance.⁵¹

There seems to have existed a special Danish interest in Saaremaa, which was probably connected with the activity of the Saaremaa pirates at sea and their leading role in controlling the trade routes that started from the coast of the Eastern Baltic. Even though it remains unknown whether the campaign in 1179 was originally directed against Saaremaa, the Couronians, or Estonia in general, in 1206 and later in 1222 the Danish kings did however undertake serious and well-documented attempts to subdue the Estonian islands.⁵²

Full-scale crusades to these areas began in the early 13th century, and were carried out mainly by Germans and Danes. As in earlier centuries, the crusades were in the first instance also concentrated in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, suggesting that international trade was still playing an essential role in this choice. However, more spiritual reasons like the need to spread the true faith cannot be excluded as motivating forces for these campaigns.

7.2 Northern Eastern Baltic in the Final Centuries of Prehistory

The most obvious change that characterised the northern half of the Eastern Baltics around 1000 AD or at the beginning of the 11th century was the abandonment of a number of hill-forts, often together with their adjacent settlements. In several cases, new and much stronger hill-forts were erected in the vicinity of the abandoned ones in the 11th century. More than half of the Viking Age hill-forts with adjacent settlements dropped out of use along the north Estonian coast – Iru, Pada II, Koila, Toolse. By the second half of the 11th century, only three bigger hill-forts remained on the northern coast, all of them connected with favourable harbour sites, at least according to topographical criteria. Two of them were conspicuously large and mighty fortifications with massive walls; places where hundreds of people could find shelter during navigation periods. Most ships bound for Novgorod, or sailing from Novgorod towards the west, most likely stopped in these harbours for the sake of spending a night, if not longer, in a comparatively safe place.

51 Mägi 2015: 143–146.

52 Mägi 2011a.

7.2.1 *North Estonian Harbour Sites and Big Hill-forts*

One of the hill-forts that stayed in use even after 1000 AD was Purtse Tarakallas (Figure 6.7.). More than that, the place received new and more powerful fortifications, and people were active there until the 13th–14th centuries.⁵³ The location of the hill-fort was defined by what was probably the best natural harbour site in north-east Estonia (see Section 6.2.4.). Unfortunately, no proper archaeological excavations have been carried out at the Purtse hill-fort or in its vicinity.

The significance of another, similar hill-fort at Pada was presumably different. The Pada complex had been established at a place where a river ending on the north Estonian coast, and a vast zone of wetlands connecting the surrounding arable lands with central Estonia met each other (see also 6.2.4.). The Viking Age hill-fort at Pada (Pada II), together with a large adjacent settlement, was abandoned in the beginning of the 11th century. After a while, probably at the end of the 11th century, another and much bigger hill-fort (Pada I) was erected in the northern part of the former settlement. No settlement is detected in the vicinity of this later hill-fort, but the area of the yard within the fort, 1.1 ha, suggests that several hundred people could live inside the well-protected fort itself. A burial ground with inhumations dated to the 12th and the first half of the 13th centuries is known and excavated right next to the Pada hill-fort.⁵⁴ It is exceptional in Estonia to find a cemetery so close to a hill-fort; usually no graves are recorded in the vicinity of fortifications.

Little or almost nothing is known about the hill-fort in medieval Tallinn, on the Toompea cliff or, more plausibly, on the hill of Tõnismägi. A great part of the latter was simply removed at the end of the 17th century. As noted in the previous chapter (Section 6.2.2.), a cultural layer has been recorded close to medieval Tallinn, which can be interpreted as a trade centre, even though our data from this site is very limited. The semi-hypothetical settlement and hill-fort were, at least in the present stage of research, the only known trade-related complex in the 11th–12th-century Rävala district. Iru, the big Viking Age complex, had been abandoned around 1000 AD, and existed later only as an agricultural village.

At the same time, many new centres also emerged in the inland areas of coastal Estonia. Although quite a number of them appeared in the 11th century, the most intensive use of these sites was typically the period from the end of the 11th till the 13th centuries. The 11th century formed, accordingly, a kind of transformation period for the Estonian hill-forts. It was the time when the old

53 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 231–232.

54 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 226–228.

Viking Age fortifications and settlement complexes, especially the ones on the coast, had stopped functioning, while the new, bigger and stronger fortified hill-forts predominantly characterised the 12th century. In this time, several of them acquired strong fortifications of stone, laid without mortar.

The majority of coastal Estonian hill-forts were erected on the peripheral agricultural area close to wetlands (e.g. Keava, Lihula), or actually in the middle of bogs (e.g. Soontagana). At least some of them can be interpreted as semi-seasonal winter trade centres, which could be reached over frozen wetlands and rivers. Exceptions to this rule seem to be a big complex at Lohu, consisting of two hill-forts and settlements, and the hill-fort of Rakvere. The latter is, however, very poorly preserved because of a medieval castle built on top of the prehistoric fortifications.⁵⁵ The location of both Lohu and Rakvere in the middle of arable clusters suggests that these hill-forts may have functioned as political centres.

The best example of the large late Iron Age Estonian hill-forts or trading centres is Varbola about 50 km south of Tallinn. Its 2-ha enclosure was surrounded by a dry-stone wall, surviving today to a height of 10 m. Inside the hill-fort, remains of about a hundred buildings with ovens can be counted; most of them were probably small horizontal-log buildings of approximately the same size.⁵⁶ It can be assumed that people stayed in such little huts only temporarily, spending most of the time of year in their ordinary living quarters close to arable lands. In contrast to most of the hill-forts of this sort, Varbola was repeatedly mentioned in German and also in Russian sources, although it cannot be connected with any definite district, and presumably did not function as a political centre. The latter is also unlikely because of the location of Varbola in the middle of forests and wetlands, with only limited areas with arable soil in the vicinity. Varbola was probably the crossing point for substantial winter roads, but access to the hill-fort during warmer seasons might have been more complicated.

One of the most clear-cut examples of large late prehistoric Estonian hill-forts outside inhabited areas is certainly Soontagana. The hill-fort was established in the Viking Age, but was most intensively used in the 11th–13th centuries, especially in the 12th century. Proper arable lands start only 7–10 km from the hill-fort, although some small fields can also be found only 3 km from it (Figure 7.1.). In fact, the Soontagana hill-fort was located right in the middle of a vast bog that was hardly passable even as late as 100–200 years ago.⁵⁷ Although the isolated location suggests only (semi-)seasonal use of the site,

55 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 199–202, 214–215.

56 E.g. Tõnisson 1999.

57 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 266–269.



FIGURE 7.1 *The location of the Soontagana hill-fort. 1 – elevated terrain, 2 – lower terrain, mainly drained wetland, 3 – wetland, 4 – present-day settlements, 5 – Middle Iron Age or Viking Age graves, 6 – approximate Viking Age coastline. Drawn after present-day map.*

the culture layer detected at the hill-fort is quite as intensive as in other big hill-forts in Estonia.

The location of Soontagana may have had significance as the meeting point of winter roads and sea routes. To the east and north-east of it there are extensive central Estonian wetlands with several rivers that together formed a good transport zone in winter when the land was frozen. It could have been quite easy to travel with sledges from Soontagana directly to Lake Peipus or the other way round. The north-western area, when seen from the hill-fort, is at the present time a broad wetland that reaches as far as the Baltic Sea but at some point in history was probably a bay. According to this scenario, Soontagana may have been a necessary fortified post where merchants could wait with their commodities until the sea became navigable or, conversely, the land froze properly.

Lihula hill-fort, which was considered to have been the most important early-13th-century west Estonian centre by Henry the Livonian, was situated only 20 km west of Soontagana. The location of the hill-fort and adjacent settlement at Lihula was certainly defined by a harbour site somewhere in the vicinity, although the latter has not so far been found. Both the hill-fort and the settlement at Lihula seem to have been established in the 11th century, but were totally destroyed by a medieval stone castle and a town built on the same site.⁵⁸

58 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 256–257.

7.2.2 “Towns” and Christians on the Late Prehistoric Estonian Coast

Possible 12th-century centres on Estonian coasts have been somewhat illuminated in a story that was probably written down by the archbishop of Nidaros Eysteinn Erlendsen in the 1180s.⁵⁹ The narrative is clearly religious in purpose, but also includes some facts that may be interesting for the subject here.⁶⁰

Two youths from Estonia, who were newly converted from unbelief to the faith, visited the church of the blessed martyr Olafr, to pray there. They reported that the radiance of the many miracles performed through the intervention of the blessed martyr Olafr was growing brighter throughout that still pagan nation ... One of their memorable accounts was the story related by one of them concerning his pagan father ... At one time a Christian army invaded those parts and laid waste the accursed temples, along with the people found there. The Christians then judged it a fitting time to preach the word of faith to those who lived there, while the terror of this new Christian victory was upon the land of the unbelievers.

Among those who withstood this holy mission, the father of the afore-said youth was the most bitter in his opposition ... For this man had recently lost a son in conflict with the Christians, and this grief was the chief cause of his hatred and resistance to salvation.

As often in this sort of story, the resistant father fell seriously ill, and a cure was attempted by soothsayers (*aruspices*) and “those first in conducting the impious heathen rites”, still in vain. The story continues:

And because the memory of the blessed martyr Olafr was renowned in the neighbouring districts because of the multitude of his miracles, the son therefore confidently urged his father to ask for Olafr’s grace ... His [the ill man’s] stubborn paganism was subdued at last ... He made a vow and affirmed that if he should find favour with heaven, he would both accept baptism and visit the church of the martyr as soon as he possibly could ... For it was with upright legs and renewed strength that, mindful of his vow, he eagerly hastened to the grace of baptism. Having received it, he sought the church of the martyr to perform the acts of thanksgiving, with votive offerings, for the cure which had been granted him ... he added to his former vow that, upon returning home, he would protect, to the best of his ability, any Christian fleeing from slavery among the pagans there.

59 Blomkvist 2009a.

60 A History of Norway, 67–69.

The attack by the Christians and the conversion of the young man's father must most likely have happened in the 1170s. Even though it was not said directly, the story hints at a church dedicated to St. Ólaf somewhere in the vicinity of the place where the events happened, that is, in Estonia, which the recently recovered old Estonian then hurried to visit. According to present knowledge such a church existed in Novgorod, which however would have demanded quite a venture to travel there, especially for a old man who recently had been seriously ill. What is more, the narrative clearly stated that "because the memory of the blessed martyr Olafr was renowned in the neighbouring districts".

Nils Blomkvist has pointed out that the story indirectly supports the hypothesis of Paul Johansen, according to which a church dedicated to St. Ólaf might have been erected at the end of the 12th century in what later became Tallinn.⁶¹ Trustworthy evidence of the existence of the church appears only in the 13th century, but its earlier origin cannot be excluded. It is logical to believe that individual churches were erected in the Eastern Baltic areas long before official Christianisation. According to Adam of Bremen, the Danish king had supported the building of a church in Couronia as early as the middle of the 11th century (see also Section 4.1.).⁶²

According to this hypothesis and when drawing parallels with Novgorod, a Scandinavian trading post might have existed around St. Ólaf's church in the *Rafala* centre, about 1.5 km from the area where a late prehistoric cultural layer marked a probable trading settlement. *Rafala* might have been a well-known and appropriate place, which is also indicated by the fact that the Danish king Valdemar II chose exactly this site for landing there with his navy and for building his own castle, the future Estonian centre, in 1219.

7.2.3 *The Prime of the Urnes Style*

Archaeologically the most conspicuous change that occurred in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic around the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries was the appearance of grave goods in burials. Although the custom of supplying the dead with artefacts started to spread at the end of the 10th century, the 11th–12th centuries remain the period with most abundant grave goods (Figure 7.2.). However, in most of the present-day Estonia collective burial grounds with cremations remained in use, which in most cases do not allow us to differentiate between individual graves. More individual-oriented were burials in barrows that were typically found in some southern and south-eastern parts of inland Estonia. On Saaremaa, where in the Viking Age individual cremations in stone circle graves similar to Gotland had dominated, most

61 Johansen 1951: 48–114; Blomkvist 2009a.

62 Adam of Bremen, 4:16.

of the individual stone circles were replaced in the 11th century by stone graves without a formal structure, of the kind that we know from mainland Estonia (Figures 7.3. and 7.4.).⁶³

Clearly individual were the burials of Livs that also became “visible” in the second half of the 10th century. The Livs practised both cremations and inhumations, and the latter have been particularly useful for getting an overview of artefacts in the Liv culture. Inhumations also spread gradually in 11th–12th-century Estonia, where they remained the exception rather than the dominant burial custom up to conversion. The distribution of inhumations from the east towards the west suggests that this custom was, at least to some degree, influenced by Christianity in Kiev-Rus.⁶⁴ Inhumation was also the prevailing burial custom of Latgallians on the northern bank of the Daugava River and in east Latvia. A number of big cemeteries with hundreds of graves are known and excavated in the Latgallian area (see Section 2.3.1.).

The custom of depositing artefacts in graves means that the overview of artefacts and cultural influences reflected in them is clearly better than before for the 11th–12th-century northern Eastern Baltic. Archaeological material in Estonian and Livic graves or other sites includes imported artefacts from both



FIGURE 7.2

Find complex from Keskvere grave in situ, west Estonia, the 10th century. The find (perhaps a grave or cenotaph) consisted of at least three sets of female jewellery and some tools, and was “fixed” with a spear.

PHOTOGRAPH BY M. MANDEL. FROM MANDEL 2003: 104–105, PL. LIV.

63 Mägi 2002: 125–132.

64 Selirand 1974: 178–190; Mägi 2004a.

Scandinavia and Russia. In Estonia, the latter is definitely more represented in the eastern districts.

The clearest Scandinavian impact on 11th–12th-century Estonian, Finnish, and Livic material culture was Nordic Animal Art, more precisely the Urnes Style, which was totally adopted in the Baltic Finnic culture. The number of weapons decorated with the Urnes Style and unearthed in Finland, Estonia, or the Livic area in Latvia is strikingly larger than those found in Scandinavia (Figure 7.5.). Kristina Creutz’s study has proved that at least some of these, in most cases including pattern-welded weapons, were also produced locally and not imported from Scandinavia.⁶⁵ The distribution of similar weapons in Couronia, Prussia, and other areas inhabited by ethnic Balts was considerably more modest.⁶⁶



FIGURE 7.3 *A deposit of female artefacts from Kāo-Matsi grave on Saaremaa, the 11th century (TLU AI 6503: 271).*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.

65 Creutz 2003: 118–120.

66 Kazakevičius 2002.



FIGURE 7.4 *A deposit of male artefacts (cenotaph?) from Käo-Matsi grave on Saaremaa, the 17th century (SM 10319). PHOTOGRAPH BY M. MÄGI.*

The dense distribution of 11th–12th-century ornamented and pattern-welded weapons on the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea, compared with Scandinavia, is actually foreseeable. It was the period when Christianity, where artefacts were seldom put into graves, was widespread everywhere in Scandinavian countries, while the same centuries were rich in grave goods in the eastern Baltic. Research in recent years, however, has demonstrated that several motifs in the Urnes Style occur only in the northern part of the Eastern Baltic. The style was, accordingly, not only adopted but also developed in local culture.⁶⁷ We can only guess that the same probably also characterised the 8th to the 10th centuries, when our knowledge of artefacts is, due to the local burial customs, quite meagre.

Most Eastern Baltic and Finnish artefacts decorated in the Urnes style can be associated with warriors. The style decorated both weapons (sockets of spearheads, sword hilts, scabbard ends; Figure 7.6.) and other artefacts like belt fittings and buckles.⁶⁸ Belt fittings decorated in the Urnes Style, or with an ornament strongly influenced by the style, are, however, very widespread in some coastal areas, where they sometimes were presumably also used by women (Figure 7.7.).⁶⁹ To a certain extent, the Urnes Style is known on other items, for instance on penannular brooches that both men and women used to decorate themselves with.⁷⁰ Whether it is possible to connect the penannular brooches decorated in Urnes Style only or predominantly with warriors is unknown – in Estonian collective graves, no artefacts belonging to particular burials can be distinguished.

Weapons and other artefacts decorated in the Urnes Style were widespread in the same areas where the shared cultural sphere of warriors was also obvious in earlier periods. On the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea, most such items have been unearthed on the Finnish coast, in coastal Estonia, in the area inhabited by Livs, and, to a somewhat smaller extent, in Couronia. Only some single examples can be pointed out in other regions.

Several artefact types in 12th-century Estonia, especially jewellery, were common in the Novgorod area.⁷¹ The local culture was now influenced by north-west Russian areas to about the same extent as it had earlier been affected by Scandinavian influence. However, the Russian influence seems to have been different, since it also embraced the female sphere, perhaps even more than the male. It cannot be excluded that the similarities in female decoration

67 Jets 2013: 96, 194–203.

68 Jets 2012.

69 Mägi 2002: 96–99; Jets 2013: 159–184.

70 Jets 2013: 184–194.

71 Selirand 1974: 202–203.

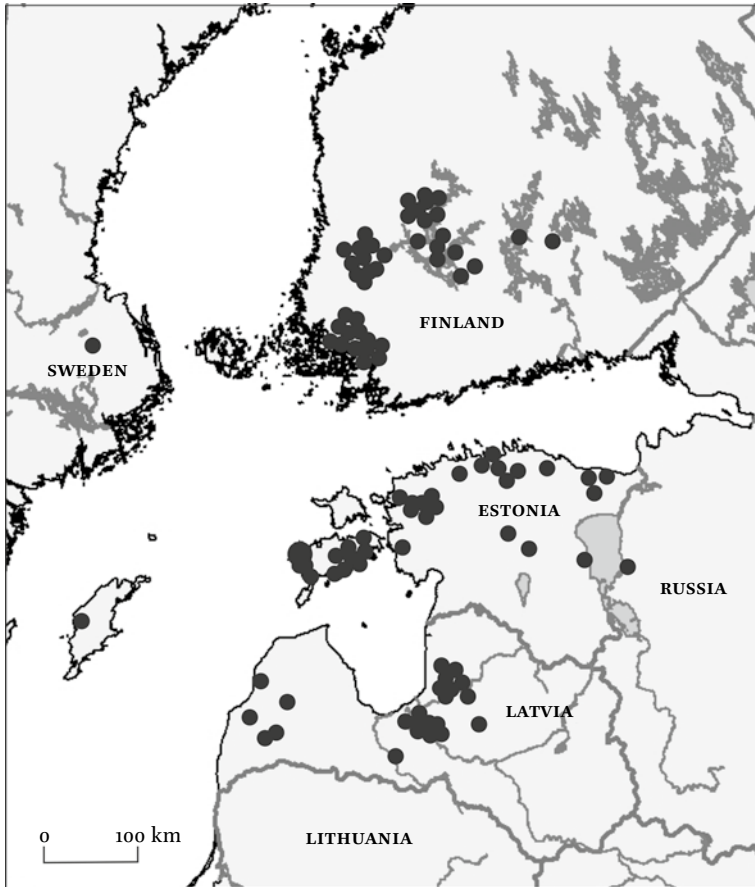


FIGURE 7.5 *Distribution of weapons decorated in Urnes Style.*
 BASED ON LEHTOSALO-HILANDER 1985; JETS 2013: 91–148.

reflected first of all similar fashions among Finnic-speaking people in north-west Russia and in the territory of present Estonia. The influences were not one-sided, but mutual, and artefacts of Estonian origin have been recorded at north-west Russian archaeological sites as well.⁷²

7.2.4 *Political Centres in Inland Estonia*

Although quite a number of hill-forts with adjacent settlements, most of them not very big, were also abandoned around 1000 AD in inland Estonia, the most important centres continued their existence here even after that time. The most relevant centres were still Tartu and Otepää.

⁷² Selirand 1974: 203; Khvoshchinskaya 2004.

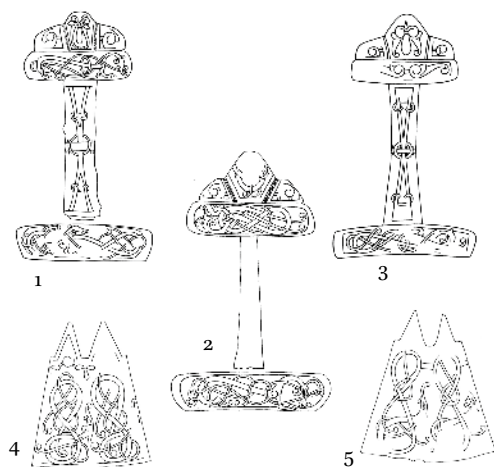


FIGURE 7.6 *Selection of ornaments from Estonian sword hilts and spearhead sockets. 1 – Maidla (AM 839: 1, 2), 2 – Karja parish (in private possession), 3 – Kurevere (AI 4368: 38), 4 – Lehtse (TLU AI 3937), 5 – Saaremaa (TLU AI K 85: 116). From: Jets 2013, Figs 46, 48: 2, 61: 1–4. DRAWN BY I. JETS.*

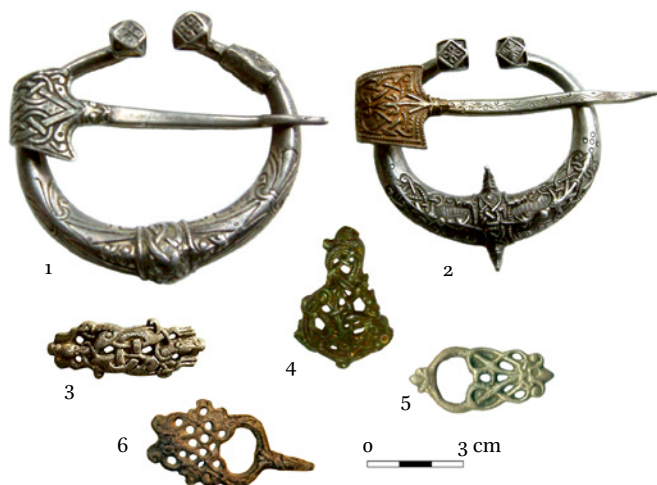


FIGURE 7.7 *Some other Estonian artefacts except weapons decorated in Urnes style. 1 – Padiküla (TLU AI 3562: 1), 2 – Kostivere (TLU AI 3797: 6), 3 – Ratla (in private possession), 4 – Lümandu (in private possession), 5 – Maidla (AM 580: 5542), 6 – exact findspot unknown (in private possession). From: Jets 2013, Figs 81: 1–2, 68: 1–2, 70: 2, 4. PHOTOGRAPHS BY I. JETS.*

Tartu on the river route through central Estonia flourished in the 10th–11th centuries (see Section 6.2.9.). The 11th-century cultural layer at the Tartu hill-fort, as well as on the two adjacent settlements, was intensive and large, and could easily be compared, for instance, with Pskov. Find material at Tartu demonstrated a very close resemblance to contemporary finds at Pskov, but also Novgorod (see also Section 6.2.10.). At the same time, finds and ceramics originating from north-west Russia were not at all characteristic of all inland Estonian centres; even at Otepää, the next-biggest centre of the region, the Slavic pottery has been found in visibly smaller quantities than at Tartu.⁷³

The number of burial grounds in the vicinity of Tartu was bigger in the 11th–12th centuries than it was in the Viking Age, but still modest compared with some other districts in Estonia.⁷⁴ Silver hoards, on the other hand, were abundant around Tartu in the 11th century, while fewer of them are known from the 12th century. This was, however, a tendency that characterised the whole of Estonia. Andres Tvauri has interpreted the phenomenon as reflecting a safe period for Estonians in the 12th century, following a more dangerous time in the 11th century.⁷⁵

The modest number of hoards in the vicinity of 12th-century Tartu can be connected with the generally meagre find material of Tartu from this period. Tvauri has demonstrated that the culture layer at Tartu became clearly less intensive at the end of the 11th century and stayed as such throughout the following hundred years, although according to written sources the hill-fort also existed in the 12th century. At the beginning of the 13th century, it even appeared in chronicles as the main centre in south-east Estonia. Tvauri has suggested that perhaps 12th-century Tartu was only a hill-fort, and that without even a permanent garrison. He also points to the lack of clearly 12th-century finds in the settlements.⁷⁶

Another important centre in south-east Estonia, Otepää, seems, according to the find material, to have been used equally intensively both in the 11th and the 12th centuries. The culture layer of this site is, on the other hand, very much damaged by a medieval stone castle, and the excavation results have not yet been thoroughly analysed. Russian chronicles mentioned the hill-fort of Otepää several times in the course of the 12th century.⁷⁷

The lack of the 12th-century layer is also obvious at Viljandi, which was the centre of Sakala, another inland Estonian district. Some finds from the

73 Tvauri 2001: 248–250.

74 Tvauri 2001: 203–206.

75 Tvauri 2001: 207.

76 Tvauri 2001: 250–251.

77 Tönnisson *et al.* 2008: 307–309.

12th century have, however, been recorded in the area in the vicinity of the hill-fort, and some researchers have, therefore, claimed that the 12th-century layer may have been removed from the site. Viking Age finds are detected under the later castle, and the Viljandi hill-fort was several times called the most important centre in Sakala district in the early-13th-century chronicles.⁷⁸ However, another hill-fort, Sinialliku, only 7 km south-west from the Viljandi one seems to have been used only in the 12th century, which perhaps explains the lack of this century layer at Viljandi. The Sinialliku hill-fort is, unfortunately, partly destroyed and only a little excavated archaeologically. Its area was 0.4 ha and the location of the hill-fort at the crossroads was not less suitable than that of Viljandi.⁷⁹ There are actually some other 12th-century hill-forts known in the Viljandi district (Lõhavere, Naanu), but these were smaller and probably functioned as residences of some particular chieftains.

As for trade centres, the Alatskivi hill-fort on the western bank of Lake Peipus could be pointed out. The northern and eastern banks of this lake are mainly areas that were unsuitable for agriculture – a situation that does not favour the establishment of prehistoric harbour sites. Only a few small clusters of arable lands, separated by extensive wetlands, characterised the western coast of Lake Peipus. There was only one exception from this pattern, namely the central part of the western bank, where proper agricultural lands reached almost to the lake. A harbour site, where ships sailing along the big lake could land and replenish their needs has been suggested there at the small Lahepera Lake, formerly a bay.⁸⁰ The hill-fort of Alatskivi with adjacent settlement was situated only 3–4 km from the Lahepera Lake. The complex was first erected at the beginning of our era, and was used continuously in the 10th–12th centuries.⁸¹

7.3 The East Attacks

As described in the final part of Chapter 6, the relationships between Kiev-Rus princedoms and the inhabitants of the Eastern Baltic, mainly of present-day Estonia, became tenser around 1000 AD. The former allies turned into enemies. The phenomenon seems to have coincided with the abrupt cessation of Scandinavian supremacy in present-day Russia, as well as with rapid Slavonisation of the elite there.

78 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 275–277.

79 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 277–278.

80 Karro 2015.

81 Tõnisson *et al.* 2008: 292–293.

As one might expect, attacks from the east against the Eastern Baltic areas differed to a certain extent from those described in Scandinavian sources. First of all, the Russian princes assaulted mainly inland areas, not the coasts as was characteristic for Scandinavians. Kiev-Rus, at least its northern part, did not have a particularly maritime culture, and the princes did not have powerful sea-going fleets at their disposal. It is only seldom mentioned in chronicles that the princes attacked someone “on boats”, and even then this frequently happened in cooperation with some other people. Since it was the easiest, in the wetland-rich northern areas, to move over frozen swamps and along frozen rivers, most attacks were undertaken in wintertime. The targets of campaigns seem, however, to have been largely defined by trade and trade routes, as in previous periods.

The 12th century was the time when the Russian princedoms developed into individual states, whose dependency on the great prince remained only nominal. Furthermore, in 1130 the title of great prince was transferred from Kiev to Vladimir, 200 km east of Moscow, which was the centre of the Vladimir-Suzdal princedom. In 1169 the prince of Vladimir-Suzdal conquered Kiev and plundered it thoroughly, an event which is considered to be the end of the Kiev-Rus state in historical writing.

1136 is counted as the beginning of the independent Novgorod state, where *veche* (the Russian counterpart of the Scandinavian *Thing*) made decisions and the prince's political power was limited. Pskov was to a certain degree dependent on Novgorod. Polotsk was independent and ruled over the whole Daugava-Western Dvina route, with the petty princedoms of Jersika and Koknes along it.

7.3.1 *Battles for Tartu*

The first certain Russian campaign against the *Chud'* took place at Tartu, according to the *Primary Chronicle*, in 1030, in reality perhaps some years later.⁸²

To Yaroslav was born his fourth son, and he named him Vsevolod. In this year, Yaroslav attacked the *Chud'* and conquered them. He thus founded the town of Yuryev.

According to the general opinion, the prince named “the town” after his own baptismal name, Yuri, and it denotes the present-day Tartu.⁸³ It is, however, not possible that the hill-fort or “town” was founded by Prince Yaroslav, since Tartu had existed as an important centre for several hundred years before the attack.

82 The Russian Primary Chronicle, year 1030 (6538). See also Tvauri 2001: 215–220.

83 Up to the early 20th century, Tartu's name in Russian was Yuryev.

We may assume that the conquest of Tartu should be considered in the context of the final stage in Yaroslav's own fight for power. In 1036 Yaroslav imprisoned for decades his last rival, his brother Sudislav, who was the prince of Pskov.⁸⁴ Although the chronicles did not mention the conquest of Pskov, some archaeologists believe that Pskov was burnt down, as indicated by a burning layer dated to approximately this time. Tvauri believes that Tartu, which belonged to the same cultural district as Pskov, was perhaps conquered in course of the same campaign.⁸⁵

After that Tartu-Yuryev became an administrative centre for the Russian princes, which is indicated archaeologically by an intensive 11th-century cultural layer. The importance of Tartu seems, according to archaeology, to have diminished considerably at the end of the 11th century, which may be explained by some other events described in Russian chronicles. In the spring of 1061 a people called *Sosol'* attacked Tartu, burnt down the hill-fort and town, as well as villages around them (see in detail the following section). Tartu did not recover from this blow, its importance diminished remarkably for about a century afterwards.⁸⁶

It is, nevertheless, difficult to consider Tartu quite insignificant in the 12th century. According to the chronicles, the place was conquered again by Prince Vsevolod in 1133 or 1134.⁸⁷ The modest archaeological evidence does not, however, indicate Tartu becoming an administrative centre again; more likely, the hill-fort was simply plundered. The same can be suggested for 1191–1192, when the united army of Novgorod and Pskov, according to the written sources, conquered Tartu and laid waste the area around it.⁸⁸ In any case, the chronicler Henry the Livonian called Tartu one of the most important centres in early 13th-century southern Estonia.

7.3.2 *Clash between Russian Princes and Syslar*

The assumption that only some inhabitants of the present-day Estonia, those who were previously considered part of *Garðaríki*, were called *Chud'*, is indirectly supported by the story of *Sosol'* in Russian chronicles. Despite some other, incompletely argued ideas presented in early historical writing, most modern researchers agree that the ethnonym *Sosol'* or *Ssol'* used in Russian chronicles derives from Nordic *Syslar*.⁸⁹ *Syslar* in the Eastern Baltic denoted

84 The Russian Primary Chronicle, year 1036 (6544).

85 Tvauri 2001: 219–220 and references.

86 Tvauri 2001: 250–252.

87 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1133.

88 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1191.

89 Ligi 1968: 42–43; Tvauri 2001: 227–229.

the inhabitants of coastal Estonia, consisting of *Eysýsla* (Saaremaa) and *Aðalsýsla* (probably west and north-west Estonia, including the Harju and *Räfala*/Rävala districts around present-day Tallinn).

The narrative of *Sosol'* probably has its prologue in 1054, when some Russian chronicles announced:⁹⁰

Izyaslav [the successor of Prince Yaroslav] came to Kiev and appointed Ostromir to Novgorod. And Ostromir with Novgorodians fought against the *Chud'* and the *Chud'* killed [him], and many Novgorodians fell with him. And Izyaslav once again fought against the *Chud'* and conquered the hill-fort [*osek*] *Kedipiv*, which means the Hand of the Sun.

According to the general opinion, “the Hand of the Sun” denoted the hill-fort of Keava, or at least there was a village nearby called *Kedenpe* in the Middle Ages. *Kedenpe* can, with some reservations, be translated from Estonian as the Sun of the Hand, thus almost the translation as given in Russian chronicles.⁹¹ It would not be the only example when Estonian names in these chronicles were literally translated into Russian. The hill-fort and large adjacent settlement at Keava were excavated in 2001–2006. The layer belonging to the mid-11th-century hill-fort was poor, but the site was, nevertheless, probably still used in the 11th century.⁹²

The complex of Keava is situated at the periphery of the productive lands of the Harjumaa district, close to the vast wetland-zone in central Estonia. It was the borderland of coastal Estonia. The location of the complex suggests a connection with winter communication and roads over frozen wetlands. Prince Izyaslav, who probably proceeded from the east or south-east over the frozen bogs, had to make a journey of approximately 30 km through uninhabitable lands. In the early medieval period, it was approximately one day's travel. Such an operation, if we accept the hypothesis that *Kedipiv* was Keava, points to a very purposeful action. After ravaging inland Estonia, that is, the *Chud'* area, the prince apparently decided to attack Harjumaa on the other side of the wetland-zone. Such far-reaching campaigns of Russian princes to present-day Estonia became common in the 13th century, but were by no means so frequent in the 11th–12th centuries.

Harjumaa, the district south of the present-day Tallinn, was probably part of the area called *Aðalsýsla* in Nordic sources, which, together with the Estonian

90 Mäesalu 2012, with reference to the Novgorod Fourth Chronicle.

91 Mäesalu 2012.

92 Lang 2012.

islands, formed a region with the name *Syslar*. A record from six years later about the same prince can presumably be associated with the *Syslar* name.⁹³

Iziaslav Yaroslavich waged war on the *Sosol'* and he ordered them to pay a tax of 2000 *grivnas*. They promised to do so, but later they expelled the tax collectors. Then in spring they waged war around *Yuryev*, setting fire to the fort and buildings, and they did considerable damage. They fought as far as Pskov. The men of Pskov and Novgorod went out to fight and a thousand Russians fell, but so did countless *Sosol'*.

The Russian campaign probably reached further in 1060 than before, perhaps as far as Rafala/Rävala. As if confirming this idea, some Russian chroniclers have added later to the ethnonym *Sosol' kolyvantsy*,⁹⁴ that is, the inhabitants of Tallinn or the vicinity of it.⁹⁵ The interpretation of *Sosol'* as the inhabitants of a quite large and wealthy *Aðalsýsla* also correlates well with the amount of scat that the *Sosol'* paid to the Russian prince – 2000 *grivnas*. For the 11th century, this must have been a really big scat. The principedom of Novgorod, for instance, paid the same amount to the great prince in Kiev till the beginning of the 11th century.⁹⁶

Like nearly all the campaigns of Russian princes, Iziaslav's expedition was presumably also carried out in winter, over frozen land. The fact that the counter-attack by the *Sosol'* was undertaken in spring suggests the use of ships, and therefore a maritime culture. This aspect alone precludes most other candidates for *Sosol'* that have been proposed before, e.g. the Sakala district in south Estonia or some ethnic Baltic group near the Daugava River.⁹⁷ Mainland roads in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic became virtually impassable in spring, ruling out any real possibility of an overland campaign. The most probable itinerary for the *Sosol's* attack was sailing along the Narva River and down Lake Peipus, after which it was possible to attack first Tartu at the Emajõgi River, and thereafter the Pskov district at the Velikaya River. The chronicles leave us with the impression that the campaign was quite successful for the *Sosol'*, at least the scat they needed to pay was never mentioned later. What is

93 The Pskov 3rd Chronicle, year 1060.

94 *Kolyvan* is the old Russian name for Tallinn. The term *kolyvantsy* generally appears in Russian chronicles only in 1223 in association with the siege of Tallinn (Tvauri 2001: 229 and references). In the 11th century, when the events described here took place, the name was probably not in use yet.

95 Tvauri 2001: 229; Mäesalu 2015 and references.

96 The Russian Primary Chronicle, years 1012–1014 (6520–6522).

97 For overview of different theories see Tvauri 2001: 227–228.

more, the expeditions of Russian princes to the territory of present-day Estonia seem to have stopped for some time after the year 1060/1061, at least according to the written sources.

Rounding off the subject of the *Sosol'*, it should be noted that the name did not occur in later written sources. No military expeditions of Russian princes further into the country than inland Estonia (including Virumaa) are known from the 12th century either. In the beginning of the 13th century, when such far-reaching campaigns were started again, all inhabitants in the territory of present-day Estonia were called *Chud'*, as was also typical for later centuries. As for archaeological evidence, the material culture seems to have conformed to a great extent everywhere in the mainland part of Estonia by the 12th century. The early 13th-century chronicler Henry the Livonian writes, like the later descriptions in Russian written sources, of Estonians as one group, although he differentiates inhabitants of particular districts within this group.

7.3.3 *Other Fights between the Chud' and the Princedoms of Novgorod and Pskov*

The Russian princes' attacks against the *Chud'* seem to occur in clusters in certain periods when several expeditions were carried out, while in decades between them no military activity against the *Chud'* was recorded in written sources. Quite frequently, the attacks were revenge expeditions from one side or the other. Several references mention a victory by the *Chud'*, or the question of who won was left open, and the chroniclers refer simply to abundant casualties. The fight seems to have been relatively balanced.

The second quarter and central part of the 11th century, when a princely centre was established in Tartu, can probably be interpreted as the most successful time for the Russian princes. The defeat by the *Sosol'* in 1060 ended this less than 30-year-long period, and new attacks followed from the Russian side only in the 1110s.⁹⁸ In the course of this new outbreak of war the hill-fort of *Medvezhya Golova* (the Head of a Bear) was attacked and subdued. There is, however, no data that this fort, in Estonian Otepää, which was one of the biggest in south Estonia, was subsequently re-organised as a Russian power-centre. These events were followed by interventions in the 1130s, resulting first in defeat of the Novgorodians and then another conquest of Tartu.⁹⁹

The second half of the 12th century was characterised by intensified campaigns of the *Chud'* especially against Pskov. The chronicles announce events in 1176, when "all the land of *Chud'*" had attacked Pskov, killed many important men and other people, but suffered many fatal casualties themselves.

98 The Chronicle of Novgorod, years 1111, 1113, 1116.

99 The Chronicle of Novgorod, years 1130, 1131, 1133.

The princes of Novgorod and Polotsk concluded a treaty for a common fight against Lithuanians and *Chud'* in 1191, but in the same year Novgorod was allied with Pskov in an expedition against Tartu and Otepää, a campaign successful for the Russian princedoms.¹⁰⁰

A battle between *Chud'* and Pskov also took place on Lake Peipus, a part of the relevant communication route from the Baltic Sea to the Dnepr River. In 1190 the Pskovians had killed what the chronicles called Coastal-*Chud'*, who had come to the lake with seven ships, presumably over the rapids of Narva. These *Chud'* possibly threatened the ships of Pskov, which were sailing on Lake Peipus. In any case, the Pskovians took the ships of the *Chud'* that they had killed back to Pskov.¹⁰¹ Whether the *Chud'* in this late 12th-century writing already denoted all inhabitants of present-day Estonia, or the name applied only to the inhabitants of Virumaa, is not known. Topographically Virumaa is a coastal district which culturally was closer to inland Estonia and was possibly counted under the term *Garðaríki*, thus also the *Chud'* Land, in earlier times.

7.3.4 *Relations between the Princedom of Novgorod, Karelia, and Finland*

To understand the context of where the fights between Novgorod and the present-day Estonia happened, a short overview the political relations between Novgorod and Baltic Finnic peoples outside the *Chud'* Land might be useful. However, not all ethnicities mentioned in the Russian chronicles can be identified. In 1042 a people called *Yem* was mentioned for the first time, since prince Vladimir, son of Yaroslav, and the Novgorodians had arranged a successful expedition against them.¹⁰² The same was repeated a hundred years later, in 1123.¹⁰³ A bigger war was waged against the *Yem* in the 1140s, where *Vod'* (Votes) and *Korel* (Karelians) were also engaged. The latter always appeared as allies to Novgorod, and were probably dependent on this princedom to some degree.

Most researchers believe that the *Yem* were either the inhabitants of Häme district (in central Finland) or some other people in the eastern part of present-day Finland.¹⁰⁴ The description that the Russian chronicles have provided us with seems most likely to refer to some ethnic group on the northern banks of Lake Ladoga.¹⁰⁵ A large number of incidents involving the *Yem* presumably took place somewhere around the big lake. In some events the *Yem*

100 The Chronicle of Novgorod, years 1176, 1191, 1192.

101 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1190.

102 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1042 (6550).

103 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1123 (6631).

104 Saksa *et al.* 2003: 462; Taavitsainen 2003.

105 See also Uino 1997: 193.

can be associated with ships, while sometimes they were attacked or themselves attacked in winter, i.e. they could not have lived very far from Novgorod. In 1142 the *Yem* waged war in the estates of Novgorod, but were defeated by warriors from Ladoga. As early as the following year, perhaps the following spring, the Karelians assaulted the *Yem* and destroyed two of their ships.¹⁰⁶ That the Karelians tended to use ships when fighting with the *Yem* is also apparent from a message from 1191, when the Karelians and Novgorodians sailed to plunder the *Yem* lands.¹⁰⁷ The fact that the *Yem* could not have inhabited areas very far away from Novgorod is also implied in the description of events in the winter of 1149, when the *Yem* had attacked the Votes, that is, had come overland to the areas around Novgorod or between Novgorod and present-day Estonia.¹⁰⁸ In 1186 a group of young men from Novgorod undertook a random expedition against the *Yem*.¹⁰⁹

Battles between Novgorod and the *Yem* were described for the last time in the Russian chronicles in 1227–1228. The *Yem* had laid waste the land on the banks of Lake Ladoga, or at least on its eastern bank, and were fatally defeated by the Novgorodians.¹¹⁰

7.3.5 *Polotsk and the Control of Russian Princes over the Daugava River*

Unlike all the problems with the *Chud'*, only very few places in the Russian chronicles refer to conflicts with the inhabitants of present-day Latvia. The data are confined mainly to the note that in 1106 *Zimegola* (Sembgallians) beat “sons of Vseslav, all the brothers” and killed 10000 men from their retinue. It is controversially not known who exactly Vseslav was, although the chronicles most likely meant the prince of Polotsk.¹¹¹ Just on the border of the period treated here, in 1200, a campaign from Novgorod and some of its allies to *Lotygala* was mentioned, where *Lotygala* probably denoted Latgallia.¹¹² In addition, in 1111 and 1180 there were expeditions by Novgorod princes to *Očela*, which is sometimes interpreted as the district of Adzele in Latgallia. On the other hand, the last of these notes declared that those attacked were *Chud'*, who escaped to the seashore, which is hardly possible if *Očela* had really been Adzele. Some

106 The Chronicle of Novgorod, years 1142 (6650) and 1143 (6651).

107 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1191 (6699).

108 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1149 (6657).

109 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1186 (6694).

110 The Chronicle of Novgorod, years 1227 (6735) and 1228 (6736).

111 Nestors *krønike*, year 1106 (6614) and footnote 86.

112 The Chronicle of Novgorod, year 1200 (7708).

historians have suggested, therefore, that *Očela* was more likely some district in Virumaa in north-east Estonia.¹¹³

A possible explanation of the lack of written sources about conflicts between the Russian princedoms and Latgallians, Livs, or other inhabitants in the present-day Latvia is the absence of chronicles in Polotsk. It seems that this princedom either did not have a tradition of chronicle-writing, or the eventual chronicles have simply not survived. The general tendency is that the Russian chronicles talk predominantly of events that were relevant to their “own” princedoms. The basin of the Daugava River belonged, for topographical reasons, mainly to the sphere of influence of Polotsk, and not, for instance, Novgorod (for communication routes through Polotsk see 3.2.4.).¹¹⁴

Henry the Livonian has written that both Livs and a number of Latvians had lived under the political influence of Russian princedoms since the end of the 12th century at the latest. The Livs seem to have been subordinated to the prince of Polotsk, even though this dependency was probably limited to paying scat. Further east along the Daugava River were situated the princedoms of Koknes and Jerzika, societies that Henry the Livonian actually called Russian princedoms. Although Henry never directly wrote that they were controlled by the princedom of Polotsk, a sort of dependency can still be assumed. The widespread opinion is that these societies were, however, predominantly Latgallian, but were ruled by Orthodox Christian princes that were dynastically affiliated with Russian princes. For the remaining part of Latgallia, too, scat liability to the Russian (Pskov?) princedoms is normally assumed only in some particular districts; it is unknown when such political affiliation might have started.¹¹⁵

7.4 Landscapes around the Daugava Route

As was mentioned earlier, only a very limited number of written sources are available for the Daugava River route in the 11th–12th centuries, except the very end of this period. It is, therefore, fortunate that archaeological evidence from this area is varied and abundant.

7.4.1 *Latgallian Hill-forts and Princedoms*

Most researchers agree that the Daugava Way was most intensively used in the 11th–12th centuries when hill-forts along it formed a certain defence and

¹¹³ Tarvel 1975; see also Selart 2002: 59.

¹¹⁴ Selart 2002: 59–63.

¹¹⁵ Selart 2002: 59–61.

control system.¹¹⁶ The most influential of these hill-forts seem to have been Jersika and Koknes, princedom centres mentioned in several written documents. Both of them have been archaeologically excavated.

The late prehistoric Koknes hill-fort was overbuilt by a German stone castle at the beginning of the 13th century and is therefore less well preserved. Comprehensive excavations have been carried out at the hill-fort of Jersika (Figure 7.8.) where, among other finds, remains of a late-12th-century building have been unearthed and interpreted as an eventual Orthodox church.¹¹⁷ Even if this particular interpretation is wrong, it seems probable that the princes of Koknes and Jersika, who were closely related with the princely dynasties of Kiev-Rus, were converted to the Orthodox faith. The same may have been true for many or even a majority of the members of their retinue. Connections with other Kiev-Rus princedoms are also indicated by a seal found in Koknes that has an analogue in Ryurik's Gorodishche.¹¹⁸

The estates of the princedom of Jersika are believed to have reached far from the immediate basin of the Daugava River. Several other hill-forts are known



FIGURE 7.8 *The hill-fort of Jersika in 1939.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY FR. BALODIS (LNVM EXCAVATION REPORTS AA 205).
COURTESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LATVIA.

¹¹⁶ Radiņš 1998; see also Māgi 2011b.

¹¹⁷ Spirģis 2012 and references.

¹¹⁸ Spirģis 2012.

in this area, which probably functioned as centres of sub-districts. Some of these appear to have been most influential, e.g. Oliņkalns, which was briefly described in Chapter 6 of this book (see Section 6.3.), or Asote.¹¹⁹

The hill-fort of Asote about 145 km from the estuary of the Daugava River was first used in the Bronze Age, but then abandoned. The hill-fort was re-built at the end of the 9th century, when it functioned as a political centre for a hill-fort district subordinated to the principdom of Jersika. Archaeological excavations at the fort and adjacent settlement revealed abundant traces of craft activity. The complex stayed in use until the 13th century.¹²⁰

Arnis Rādiņš has pointed to the appearance of scales and weights in some Latgallian burials in the 10th century. Since the time around 1000 AD, single two-edged swords were sometimes deposited in graves. Burials in the vicinity of Jersika and Koknes probably belonged to dead with a higher social status than Latgallians buried in most other cemeteries, at least according to the grave goods. Rādiņš interprets these phenomena as a sign of deepening social stratification, as well as of increasing importance of trade among the Latgallians in the beginning of the 11th century.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the amount of imported artefacts in graves remained insignificant even after that time, although the Latgallian dead were normally supplied with numerous goods for the afterlife.

7.4.2 *Settlements on the Lower Daugava River*

Viking Age hill-forts on the lower reaches of the Daugava River (see Section 6.3.1.) continued their existence in the 11th–12th centuries. At approximately the same time as Livic cemeteries appeared in the area, that is, at the end of the 10th century, large settlements right on the bank of the river also seem to have been established. Several of the latter have been excavated because of the construction works for Riga Power Station, often at approximately the same time as the Livic cemeteries. Most of the Livic cemeteries that have been archaeologically excavated were situated directly on the banks of the river or on a river-island in the vicinity of the Daugmale hill-fort.

Only a fraction of the excavation results of the settlements on the lower reaches of the Daugava River have been published. Most settlements were stretched out along the bank. Buildings were all of approximately the same size, arranged in six or seven groups, spaced 8–10 m apart, with about 50 closely spaced buildings in each group. Houses were frequently semi-pit houses, built into a hollow up to 50 cm deep. The semi-subterranean parts of the houses occupied an area of 2–4 × 3–6 m, and contained a hearth, and sometimes also

119 Rādiņš 1998, 1999b:51–54.

120 Rādiņš 1999b:43.

121 Rādiņš 1999a:169–184.

a pit cellar. Around the houses other storage pits were found.¹²² Normally they were one-room buildings, although sometimes there was also another, smaller room. Finds made it possible to connect some buildings with particular craftsmen, e.g. potter, smith, or jeweller. In the larger villages sometimes three craftsmen in one trade were represented at the same time. The total number of distinct workshops that have been archaeologically recorded in one of the biggest settlements, Laukskola, is about 40.¹²³

All the settlements on the lower reaches of the Daugava River were located on the northern bank of the river or on Dole Island, and some of them, notably Mārtiņsala and Salaspils, were fortified. On Mārtiņsala Island, the fortification consisted of a 3 m wide and 1 m high earthwork rampart in the south, while the other side was protected by the naturally steep bank of the Daugava River.¹²⁴ About 20–30 houses may have been occupied contemporaneously, housing about 100 people.¹²⁵

The settlements have normally been interpreted as ordinary Liv villages, while the discussion has mainly been about whether and to what extent they may have been connected with the hill-fort and trade centre of Daugmale (Figure 7.9.).¹²⁶ However, the size and location of the settlements suggests that we may be dealing here with semi-seasonal places, whose population may have increased considerably during navigation periods. Their function as trading places could also explain the uniformity of the building remains that were unearthed in the settlements, as well as the location of the houses in regular groups. Several buildings in these settlements were pit-houses, an otherwise little known building form in the region. The interpretation of these as trading or communication-related settlements is also supported by the presence of defensive walls in some of them.

The hill-fort of Daugmale on the southern bank of the river in the vicinity of these settlements prospered in the 11th–12th centuries. The majority of finds from the adjacent settlement and harbour site at Daugmale can be dated to the same period.¹²⁷ The hill-fort is marked by an unusually large number of craft-related finds, as well as finds reflecting both western and eastern connections (Figure 7.10.). Most of the 190 coins uncovered at the hill-fort belong to the 11th–12th centuries, too.¹²⁸ Numerous locally-made imitations of Western

122 Ciglis *et al.* 2001: 47.

123 Šnē 1997.

124 Apals *et al.* 1974: 47–48.

125 Mugurēvičs & Vasks 2001: 455.

126 For different theories see e.g. Rādiņš 1998, 2001, 2006 and Zemītis 2007.

127 Rādiņš 2006.

128 Rādiņš 1998, 2006; Šnē 2001; Zemītis 2007.



FIGURE 7.9 *The settlement and cemeteries of Laukskola in 1937. The Daugmale hill-fort can be seen on the opposite bank of the Daugava River.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY V. ĢINTERS (LNVM EXCAVATION REPORTS AA 257).

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European coins that have been found particularly at Daugmale but also elsewhere in the region have inspired Andris Šnē to put forward a theory about an ambitious chieftain at Daugmale, who tried to introduce his own currency. The trial, however, failed in the surrounding egalitarian society.¹²⁹ In addition to Western European coins, quite a number of dirhams have also been imitated in the 11th–12th-century Daugmale workshops.¹³⁰

The Daugmale hill-fort, together with all the settlements and cemeteries on both banks and on the river island formed an extensive complex on the lower reaches of the Daugava River, which would correspond with the importance of this communication route as indicated by topography. Several features suggest that the complex was to a large extent international, as indicated by numerous finds in both cemeteries and settlements.

The settlements and cemeteries attributed to the Livs continued in the 13th century, while the hill-fort and adjacent settlement at Daugmale were either abandoned or used only a little in the second half of the 12th century. The chronicle of Henry the Livonian, written in the 1220s, does not mention Daugmale at all, even though a great many of the events described in this

129 Šnē 2009.

130 Berga 2007.



FIGURE 7.10 Collection of finds from the Daugmale hill-fort (LNVM CVVM 63901 1–3 – A 9964: 2414, 2584, 2608, 4 – A 12600: 91, 5–7 – A 9964: 2433, 2413, 2608).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MĀGI.

chronicle must have occurred in the vicinity of the old hill-fort.¹³¹ However, some modest activity also seems to have taken place at the hill-fort in the Middle Ages.¹³²

7.4.3 Ethnic Diversity in the Cemeteries on the Lower Daugava River

The find material collected from Livonian cemeteries on the northern bank of the River Daugava and on the river island of Dole in the vicinity of the

¹³¹ Henry the Livonian mentioned in his chronicle that the pope forbade, as a result of a request presented by the inhabitants of Riga, travellers on their way to Semgallia from stopping in “their harbour”. The objective was to force merchants to stop in the harbour at Riga instead (Henricus Lettus, IV:7). Although some researchers have suggested that the “their harbour” on the way to Semgallia was Daugmale (Radiņš 1998, 2001, 2006), the text seems to refer to the location of this harbour downstream of Riga. One possibility for locating the harbour is at Dünamünde in the estuary of the Daugava River, at the place where the Lielupe River flows into the Daugava River (Figure 6.18.). The harbour of Dünamünde, which was also mentioned in the chronicle of Henry the Livonian as a place to leave big ships, was thus located at the junction of the route from the Daugava River to Semgallia.

¹³² Šnē 2001; Zemītis 2007.

Daugmale hill-fort, especially in the last decades, has been published much more extensively than the finds from the hill-fort and settlements (Figures 7.11. and 7.12.). Some Latvian archaeologists do not define these cemeteries as directly linked to the Daugmale trade centre, still considering them to be burial places of nearby Livonian villages, whose inhabitants took part in the activities in the hill-fort and its settlement.¹³³ Guntis Zemītis, on the other hand, has pointed to the fact that no real cemeteries have been found on the southern bank of the river where the Daugmale hill-fort is located. The only small cemetery on the southern bank, a few hundred metres from the hill-fort, consisted of only about ten 11th–12th-century Livic burials. People who were active at the Daugmale complex and died there were therefore most likely buried on the opposite bank.¹³⁴ The find material of the big Laukskola, Dole, and Rauši cemeteries, looked at in a broader perspective, nevertheless suggests that the burial ground was used by people with a different ethnic background, who were active at the Daugmale complex and resided there for some time.

Eastern Baltic late Iron Age female graves of diverse ethnic groups are normally easily distinguishable by specific jewellery. On the other hand, it is archaeologically nearly impossible to differentiate grave goods of mainland

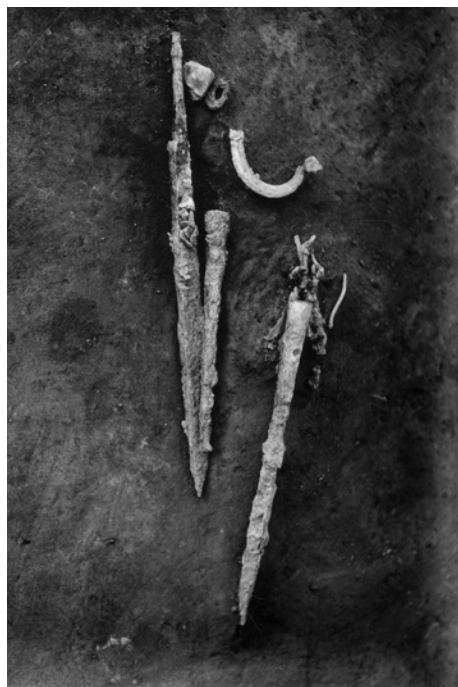


FIGURE 7.11

Male cremation grave No 1 from Laukskola cemetery.

PHOTOGRAPH BY V. ĢINTERS (LNVM EXCAVATION REPORTS AA 257). COURTESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LATVIA.

¹³³ Radiņš 2006; A. Zariņa 2006: 317–320.

¹³⁴ Zemītis 2007.



FIGURE 7.12 *Double inhumation burial No 6 and 7, a woman and a 1-2-year-old child from Laukskola cemetery.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY V. ĢINTERS (LNVN EXCAVATION REPORTS AA 257).

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Estonian, Livonian, Couronian, Gotlandic, central Swedish, or Osilian male burials.¹³⁵ However, these need not occur in all graves. More specific artefacts can be found in Latgalian and Semigalian male burials, and that is true not only for ethnically biased ornaments but also for weaponry.¹³⁶

At Laukskola cemetery, female burials with jewellery characteristic of not only the Livic districts but several surrounding areas – Semgallia Middle Sweden, Gotland, Couronia, Saaremaa, inland Estonia – have been recorded (Figures 7.13.–7.14.). According to Latvian archaeologist Roberts Spirģis, the percentage of undisturbed female inhumation graves for non-Livic ethnicities in the lower Daugava region cemeteries was about 28% (in Spirģis 2008: Fig. 157 even 36–37%), and it was especially high in the cemeteries in the vicinity of Daugmale.¹³⁷ So great an ethnic diversity of female burials has not been found in any other prehistoric burial ground in the Eastern Baltic. The only explanation offered so far is intensive cultural contacts, or perhaps

135 As we can read in the early 13th-century chronicle, it could also be impossible to distinguish warriors from at least some of these areas in a battle (Henricus Lettus, xv:3).

136 Radoņš 1999; Gričuvienė 2005; Vaškevičiūtė 2007.

137 Spirģis 2008: 347–375, especially 373.



FIGURE 7.13 *Artefacts from a female inhumation burial No 39 at Laukskola cemetery, the second half of the 10th century (LNVM VI 128: 132–137). The woman came from Saaremaa or West Estonia.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.



FIGURE 7.14 *Artefacts from a female inhumation burial No 483 at Laukskola cemetery, 11th–12th century (LNVN VI 128: 6960–6963). The woman came from Saaremaa or West Estonia.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.

inter-marriages. It can however be assumed that the same ethnic diversity also characterised male burials in these cemeteries, but cannot be traced so easily by relying only on evidence collected from graves.

This is especially probable for cremation graves with artefacts of a more international character (Figure 7.15.). The percentage of weapon burials among



FIGURE 7.15 *Artefacts from a male cremation grave No 8 at Laukskola cemetery, the late 10th or the 11th century (LNVM VI 128: 8949: 1–21).*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.

cremations was conspicuously high, and twice as many men as women had been buried this way at Laukskola.¹³⁸ Cremation was the prevailing burial custom on Viking Age and 11th–12th-century Saaremaa, mainland Estonia, and Couronia.¹³⁹ Livs predominantly practised inhumations although cremations were not completely unknown among them either.¹⁴⁰ It can be suggested, therefore, that graves of a more international character at so-called Livonian cemeteries next to the Daugmale hill-fort and surrounding settlements were burial places not only of natives but also people from other areas who had died during their stay in the trade centre.

¹³⁸ G. Zariņa 2006.

¹³⁹ Selirand 1974: 178–190; Žulkus 1991: 11; 2000; Stankus 1995; Mägi 2002: 125–137.

¹⁴⁰ Tõnisson 1974: 38–40; Šnore 1996; A. Zariņa 2006: 408.

Biological anthropologist Gunita Zariņa has tried to calculate the size of the population that was buried in the Laukskola cemetery.¹⁴¹ She concluded that during the first century of its existence, the second half of the 10th and the first half of the 11th centuries, a population consisting of about 45 persons was buried in the Laukskola cemetery. During the period from the middle of the 11th century till the middle of the 12th century the population using the cemetery had grown to about 110 persons, and decreased back to 45 again after that. These calculations were, however, based on the assumption that the people who were buried in the cemetery were ordinary agricultural villagers, who all lived at the place permanently. If we accept the theory of a trading complex with a semi-permanent population, these figures just point to the most intensive use of the site in the years 1050–1150, which would tie in with other data referring to trade along the Daugava River.

7.4.4 *Agents of Change in the Lower Reaches of the Daugava River*

As was indicated by the ethnic diversity of graves in the lower reaches of the Daugava River, the Livs were dominating actors, but not the only ones controlling the entrance to this important communication route.

Female burials decorated with Middle Swedish or Gotlandic jewellery and unearthed in cemeteries around the Daugmale complex could all be dated to the 10th century (Figure 7.16.).¹⁴² In the 11th century the direct Scandinavian influence seems to have retreated, as was typical for more or less all areas east from the Baltic Sea. Like other coastal regions in the northern part of the Eastern Baltic, the Urnes Style in warrior decoration was adopted in the Livic society. However, among the Livs (and Karelians) what were originally Scandinavian features were also included in the female sphere of the local culture. It is especially marked in the development of the tortoise brooches that became an ethnic attribute for Livic women.¹⁴³

The former strong connections between Sweden and the Russian principalities, in which the most relevant role for the Daugava route was played by the principality of Polotsk, had weakened by the 11th century. The diminishing Scandinavian cultural influence in the Livic archaeological evidence was, in the course of the 11th century, gradually replaced by influence from the east. It is possible that not only material culture was influenced but that it was

141 G. Zariņa 2006.

142 A. Zariņa 2006: 425; Zemītis 2007; Spirģis 2008: 496–498.

143 Spirģis 2008.



FIGURE 7.16 *Artefacts from a female inhumation burial No 67 at Laukskola cemetery, the second half of the 10th century (LNVN VI 128: 333–339). The woman probably originated from Gotland.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. MÄGI.

followed by a sort of political dependency – at least, some documents from the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries seem to refer to this.¹⁴⁴

Documents from the beginning of the 13th century reveal that the Livs seem to have paid taxes to Polotsk, while they were not subject to Jersika or Koknes, which were situated geographically closer to them. Around 1184, when Bishop Meinhard, after he had arrived in the estuary of the River Daugava, wanted to start his mission and built a church in Yxkyl near Daugmale, he asked the prince of Polotsk for permission. The Livs, who inhabited these areas, were in fact the subjects of the aforementioned prince. The permission was granted, and the prince even sent presents to show his support.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Radiņš 1998.

¹⁴⁵ Henricus Lettus, I: 3; see also Selart 2002: 72.

The eastern influence was particularly obvious in the adoption of eastern floral motifs in Livic ornamentation in the 12th century.¹⁴⁶ The Livic floral style differed considerably from the generally geometric jewellery decoration used by other ethnicities in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, and it also differed from the Scandinavian animal styles. Unlike the distribution of the 11th-century animal style, the Livic floral style was represented both on the local jewellery and on sword hilts. Quite predictably, the closest parallels to the floral motifs used by the Livs can be found in Kiev-Rus, especially the southern areas, that is, along the trade route from the Livic lands to Kiev and further south.¹⁴⁷

Somewhat more obvious proof of connections between the Russian princes and the upper strata of the Livs are the so-called pendants of Ryurikovitch, probable status symbols found mainly in Livic female graves and decorated with the same iconography as was used by the ruling family of Polotsk. Although these pendants in graves date mainly to the 12th–13th centuries, the earliest of them have been found at some Livic hill-forts and may perhaps belong even to the end of the 11th century.¹⁴⁸ Numerous cross-shaped pendants, most of them of eastern origin, should also be mentioned. As many as 85 of these have been found at the Daugmale hill-fort, in addition to a number in Livic burials. The Latvian archaeologist Spirģis has used the evidence of so many cross-shaped pendants, together with some other criteria, to argue that 12th-century Daugmale may, among other things, have functioned as an Orthodox missionary station, albeit on an irregular basis. Some of the burials in the vicinity of the Daugmale hill-fort could, according to Spirģis, have belonged to converted Livs.¹⁴⁹

Other active actors operating in the lower reaches of the Daugava River were Couronians, Semgallians, and the inhabitants of Saaremaa. Several female burials in the cemeteries around the Daugmale complex were decorated with Semgallian ornaments, especially dress pins and neck-rings. However, the differentiation of Semgallians from other ethnic groups in the lower reaches of the Daugava River is complicated because several types of the jewellery used by them, including the dress pins and neck-rings mentioned, were also widespread in northern Couronia and Saaremaa. Since gender-defined opposite orientation of burials, as was characteristic for the Semgallians, did not normally occur in the cemeteries on the lower reaches of the Daugava River, burials with

146 Spirģis 2012.

147 Tõnisson 1974: 70.

148 Mugurēvičs 1974.

149 Spirģis 2012.

such artefacts have normally been interpreted as belonging to Vends, that is, the Baltic Finnic inhabitants of the Kurzeme peninsula.¹⁵⁰

Semgallian graves generally demonstrated ethnic homogeneity throughout the whole period from the pre-Viking Age till the 13th century. Although some attacks from Russia and Sweden against them have been recorded in written sources, these connections seem to have left very few archaeological traces – the evidence of both eastern and Scandinavian influence in Semgallia is comparatively weak.¹⁵¹ The 12th century in this area, however, witnessed the consolidation of power, as indicated by large and strongly fortified hill-forts with surrounding settlements. Of these, first of all the complexes Mežotne and Tērvete should be described.

The hill-fort of Mežotne was situated on the bank of the Lielupe River and dated from the 9th till the 14th centuries (Figure 7.17.). A large adjacent settlement had been founded even earlier, in the 6th century, and lasted until the 12th century. Romas Jarockis has interpreted the site as a nodal point at an international communication route, although without specifying what particular route he meant. Two cemeteries are known in the vicinity of the Mežotne hill-fort, and the fact that it was possible to sail to the complex from the Daugava River was also mentioned in early-13th-century sources. The somewhat similar complex of Tērvete was used over a much longer period, but became an international trade centre only in the 12th century. Jarockis considered Tērvete predominantly a political centre and Mežotne an early urban centre connected with trade. Still, the political importance of Mežotne was also indicated in written documents.¹⁵²

The activity of Saaremaa inhabitants and Couronians in the lower reaches of the Daugava River is clearly demonstrated in the early 13th-century events described by chronicler Henry the Livonian. Female graves with jewellery characteristic of these two regions have been found in cemeteries around the Daugmale complex. Weapons and other warrior attributes in these regions, on the other hand, did not vary much from those of Livic warriors, leaving open the possibility that burials of men from Couronia and Saaremaa were indistinguishable from the Livic ones in the lower reaches of the Daugava River.

Several early 13th-century remarks in the chronicle of Henry the Livonian suggest that the sailors from Saaremaa were regular visitors in the lower reaches of the Daugava River. Even as late as in 1226 William of Modena, who was waiting for a favourable wind in the entrance to the Daugava River, saw

150 A. Zariņa 2006: 425–426.

151 Banyté-Rowell & Buža 2005.

152 Jarockis 2001.



FIGURE 7.17 *The hill-fort of Mežotne in 1938.*
 PHOTOGRAPH BY V. ĢINTERS (LNVM EXCAVATION REPORTS AA 305).
 COURTESY OF NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LATVIA.

Saaremaa people “returning” from Sweden with hostages and loot.¹⁵³ The statement has been explained by surmising that William was waiting for the wind at the cape of Domesnäs, because how else could the Saaremaa ships be said to “turn back”? Nevertheless, the Saaremaa sailors could have been sailing back not to Saaremaa but the market of Riga or somewhere else in the lower reaches of the Daugava River. It was predominantly the inhabitants of Saaremaa and Couronians, who, according to Henry the Livonian, took coordinated military actions soon after the Germans had taken the entrance to the Daugava Way under their control.¹⁵⁴ Similar coordinated campaigns by the Saaremaa warriors were undertaken against other nodal points on the Estonian coast, when they were conquered by foreign forces, e.g. Lihula in west Estonia and the present-day Tallinn.¹⁵⁵

153 Henricus Lettus, xxx:1.

154 E.g. Henricus Lettus, xiv:5, xv:3, xix:2.

155 Henricus Lettus, xxiv:3, xxiv:7, xxvii:3.

7.4.5 *The Beginning of Riga*

Daugmale and the complex of surrounding settlements and cemeteries were situated about 20 km from the estuary of the Daugava River, at a place where the first impassable rapids on the river occurred. Entrance upstream further along the river was, owing to these rapids, clearly complicated particularly for cargo ships with draughts that began to rapidly increase in the 11th century. German merchants and missionaries, when they started to become active in the estuary of the Daugava River, chose the vicinity of Daugmale for their first settlement, probably because it was the old Livic centre, defined by the combination of the river and the arable lands. The new, medieval trading post in Riga was, however, established about 10 km closer to the sea.

Several researchers have suggested a connection between Daugmale and Riga, considering Riga the successor to Daugmale. There is definitely some evidence for this. Archaeological excavations carried out at a site in the Old Town in Riga have even unearthed two 12th-century Livic settlements, together with a cult place in their vicinity. According to written sources, there was also a hill-fort in the close neighbourhood, although completely removed in the modern period. In addition, a 12th-century and later harbour site has been located and excavated at a site in Old Riga.¹⁵⁶

The results of archaeological excavations in the Old Town of Riga have been summarised by Andris Caune. According to his interpretation, a settlement by Livs, Semgallians, Couronian Vends, and Couronian Livs was situated in Riga in the 12th century. The settlement resembled other Livic settlements in the lower reaches of the Daugava River, both according to its layout and find material, and there were clear traces of craft activities that had taken place in Riga. Although Caune claimed that finds from a time earlier than the 12th century were almost absent in Riga, he still found it possible to suggest that trade played no role in the appearance of the site, since no imported artefacts from the 10th–11th centuries were found. The inhabitants of this early settlement in Riga mainly practised fishing, stockbreeding, and other forms of agriculture, which, according to Caune, can be proved by some ploughing marks at the cult place next to the later cathedral of Riga. In the 12th century Riga became a barter and craft centre for the Livs, visited by numerous foreign merchants.¹⁵⁷

This interpretation creates, however, some essential question marks. Riga is surrounded by extensive wetlands and sandy areas that spread ten or more kilometres from it in all directions (Figure 6.18.). It is quite predictable that pre-historic archaeological finds, except those mentioned, are likely to be nearly

¹⁵⁶ Caune 2007; Mägi 2015: 79–88.

¹⁵⁷ Caune 2007: 37–51.

absent in this area. The location between vast infertile lands seems not to fit with the interpretation of the site as an agricultural settlement, even less with an agricultural settlement with a multicultural character. All hypotheses about the settlement's existence before the 12th century are based on minimal or nearly absent find material.

It is perhaps not of little importance that a 11th–12th-century cult place should have been excavated under and next to the later Riga Cathedral, indicated by fire places, holes with probable offerings and post holes for massive posts. A possible cemetery was situated in the vicinity of the shrine; however, all excavated burials there seem to date to later than 1200 AD, but some stray finds suggest the use of the place as early as the 12th century.¹⁵⁸

Riga seems to have been a significant place for the Livs. At the beginning of the 13th century, at least, Germans were invited to negotiate with Livic *seniores* in Riga, rather than in one of their political centres. All the chieftains of Daugava and the Gauja Livs were summoned to the meeting that, according to Henry the Livonian, occurred in the form of a drinking party in a big building in Riga. Such a scenario seems to suggest that Riga functioned as a place of assembly in Livic society, with the necessary big buildings and treaties guaranteeing neutrality and safety for visitors. As was generally characteristic of late prehistoric places of assembly in the North, ritual and social functions were often supplemented by markets and trade, even though the latter were not dominant in the use of these places. In any case, the location of Riga was favourable not only for a place of assembly of the Livs, but also for a medieval trading city, which was established there in 1201.

7.5 Southern Couronian Coast

In many respects similar development took place on the coastal regions of the southern Eastern Baltic. Scandinavian burials in Kaup-Wiskiauten did not last longer than the beginning of the 11th century.¹⁵⁹ The trade centre at Truso stopped functioning at the same time,¹⁶⁰ and during the following century was replaced by Gdańsk.¹⁶¹ The old Amber Route had nearly stopped serving international trade. This all indicated suddenly diminishing connections with Scandinavia.

¹⁵⁸ Caune 2007: 97–117, 331–342.

¹⁵⁹ Žulkus & Bertašius 2009.

¹⁶⁰ Wróblewski 2006; Bogucki 2007.

¹⁶¹ Bogucki 2004.

No late Viking Age silver hoards have been recorded in Prussia and Couronia, and the number of Scandinavian artefacts among the local material diminished considerably towards the end of the period.¹⁶² On the other hand, at least in Prussian territory, archaeologists have reported obvious influences from Russian princedoms, starting from the 11th century.¹⁶³

Nevertheless, the cessation of Scandinavian contacts did not mean the end of trade as such. On the contrary, even an increase in regional and, to a certain extent, also international trade can be noticed, as indicated by trading centres that gained momentum on the present-day Lithuanian coast in the 11th century. Palanga and Žardė that were mentioned briefly in Chapter 6 had both existed long before the Viking Age; however, the majority of finds and building remains at these sites belonged to the period from the end of the 11th century to the 13th century. Both complexes of settlements were excavated only in the 1990s, although the hill-forts at these sites were known and even excavated before.

On the hill of Birutė beside the Palanga settlement, a stronghold existed in the 13th–14th centuries, and the same hill was used as a sacrificial place even before that. Lithuanian archaeologist Vladas Žulkus, who excavated the site, claimed that part of the walls and fortifications existed as early as the 10th century, although he has not published much evidence of this dating. Illustrations presented in his books suggest that most of the pre-13th-century activity that took place on the hill of Birutė and in its vicinity can, however, be dated to the period after 1000 AD.¹⁶⁴ In addition to the settlement next to the Birutė hill, there were some other settlements at some distance.

In places at the Palanga settlements seven layers of buildings were recorded, several of them with preserved wooden remains. Most find material from the different sites at Palanga consisted of ceramics. Žulkus has demonstrated that not only local ceramics but also potsherds from the southern coast of the Baltic Sea were characteristic of the site. He also distinguished a ceramic group that he classified as southern Scandinavian, or with strong southern Scandinavian influences; however, his arguments are not completely convincing judging by the published pictures of these potsherds. Other finds referring to contacts with Scandinavia are, according to Žulkus, some particular loom weights, and some Scandinavian artefacts have been found in cemeteries in the neighbourhood of the Palanga settlement complex. Based on these finds, Žulkus has interpreted the site as a big international colony with a considerable number

162 Bogucki 2007; Bliujienė 2008.

163 Kulakov 1994: 121–123; Shiroukhov 2015.

164 Žulkus 1997: 55–113, 331–332; 2004: 107–118, 240.

of Scandinavian inhabitants during some period, probably the 11th–12th centuries.¹⁶⁵

Less evidence has been published so far about another probable trading place on the Couronian coast, Žardė, immediately outside the southern border of present-day Klaipėda. Lithuanian archaeologist Jonas Genys has interpreted the site as a multicultural early urban centre, with an area of at least 8 ha, but counting all settlement layers together, nearly 16 ha (Figure 7.18.). As in Palanga, the settlements were located around a small hill-fort, and in the 13th–14th centuries a medieval castle was built in the same area. The find material in the Žardė site contained, according to Genys, few artefacts from Scandinavian, Western European, and Western Slavic areas, or from regions under their cultural influence. He especially emphasised Western Slavic pottery, some of which could be dated to the 9th–10th centuries. Some clay loom weights, as well as glass beads have been mentioned as possible Germanic influences, and the remains of a 12th–13th-century house interpreted as southern Scandinavian. As in Palanga, the great majority of prehistoric finds in Žardė were dated to the 11th–12th centuries.¹⁶⁶ The late date can possibly be supported by the fact that only very few dirhams have been found in the surroundings of these sites.¹⁶⁷

The location of Palanga and perhaps Žardė in the cultural landscape recalls in many respects that of Tallinn and Riga, where a cultural layer from the 11th–12th centuries and perhaps earlier is also known. Like the other Eastern Baltic centres, Palanga is also surrounded by infertile coastal areas, former forests, wetlands, and sand. Arable lands start at a distance of about 4–5 km and there, at the border between infertile and arable lands, several cemeteries with a number of burials and abundant grave goods are known and have been excavated.¹⁶⁸ The complexes of Palanga and Žardė both consist of a hill-fort and several settlements, another characteristic in common with Riga and Tallinn, and perhaps Purtse on the north Estonian coast. Even more, Palanga seems to have functioned not only as a trading place but also as a cult place on the top of the Birutė hill-fort. A cult place was also excavated in Riga and another assumed in Tallinn.¹⁶⁹ We can only add that although Palanga lost most of its importance in the Middle Ages, Žardė was succeeded by Memel, later Klaipėda, which is still one of the most relevant ports in the Eastern Baltic.

¹⁶⁵ Žulkus 1997, 2004.

¹⁶⁶ Genys 1997, 2012. The author is grateful to Dr. Jonas Genys for his explanations about the Žardė site, personal communication 23.10.2015.

¹⁶⁷ Duksa 1981: 88.

¹⁶⁸ Žulkus 1997: 330–331.

¹⁶⁹ Mägi 2015.



FIGURE 7.18 *Some finds from the Žardė settlement.*
FROM: GENYS 2012.

Klaipėda is located at a favourable place at the entrance to the Couronian Lagoon. Lithuania's biggest river, the Nemunas, which unites the Baltic Sea with central Lithuanian areas, where the Lithuanian state was taking shape in the 11th–12th centuries, debouches into the Couronian Lagoon.¹⁷⁰ The most relevant centre in central Lithuania was probably Kaunas, at a place where the Nemunas met the River Neris. On the banks of the latter but further east was Vilnius, another very central place. Both Kaunas and Vilnius are marked by numerous late prehistoric sites in the surrounding areas.

7.6 Coins and Trade

Silver coins and hoards consisting of them were widespread in the countries around the Baltic Sea after the inflow of dirhams stopped. The oriental coins were just replaced by coins from other areas, particularly Western Europe.

¹⁷⁰ As was demonstrated in Chapter 3, some researchers believe that the Nemunas River debouched into the Vistula Lagoon until about 1000 AD (Žulkus & Bertašius 2009; see Section 3.2.7.) If this is true, the change of the river course may have dramatically increased the relevance of the sites on the Lithuanian coast in the 11th century.

In Sweden, Gotland included, the Kufic coins form 1/3 of all prehistoric coins, while in Estonia and Finland this proportion is 1/4.¹⁷¹ The great majority of the 11th–12th-century coins found in the Baltic Rim are of German or English origin.¹⁷²

The use of coins as weight silver, as well as the custom of depositing coins in hoards abruptly diminished in most of Scandinavia as early as the end of the 11th century, while on Gotland it continued until the beginning of the 13th century. The last silver hoards were hidden on Gotland in the 1240s, later than, for instance, in Finland.¹⁷³ In this respect, Finland was similar to Middle Sweden, where the last silver hoards date to the end of the 11th century. Estonia, on the other hand, resembled Gotland. Still, the number of hoards decreased everywhere on the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea in the middle of the 12th century. The beginning of their own coinage system in the new states seems to play a relevant role in the cessation of the custom of depositing coins in hoards as weight silver. On coasts of the Baltic Sea, this process took place at different times.¹⁷⁴

7.6.1 *Coins and Hoards in the 11th–12th Centuries*

European coins were distributed in the areas around the Baltic Sea quite as unevenly as Viking Age dirhams (Figure 7.19.). Like dirhams, these coins, too, seem to indicate the most relevant international trade routes that in most cases were the same as in the Viking Age. However, some variability in the distribution pattern of the coins can be observed at a local level, mainly that the 11th–12th-century coins were geographically more widespread than dirhams.

Nevertheless, the distribution of coins may not always have been a direct indicator of the intensity of trade. For instance, Gotland 1055–1075 AD was characterised by a sharp decrease in coin imports, presumably caused by the drop in the silver content of the coins in this period. Frisian coins especially could sometimes include so little silver that Gotlandic merchants who traded in terms of the weight of silver lost interest in them. Still, other sources did not indicate a decrease in trade in this period. The most intensive use of a Gotlandic trade port, Fröjel, started in the second half of the 11th century and Köpingsvik, a relevant trade centre on Öland, was established in the same time. Trade as such did not cease but the role of weighed coins in it diminished.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Talvio 2002: 106.

¹⁷² Jonsson 2009.

¹⁷³ Talvio 2002: 109.

¹⁷⁴ Talvio 2002: 109–116; Leimus 2003.

¹⁷⁵ Jonsson 2009.

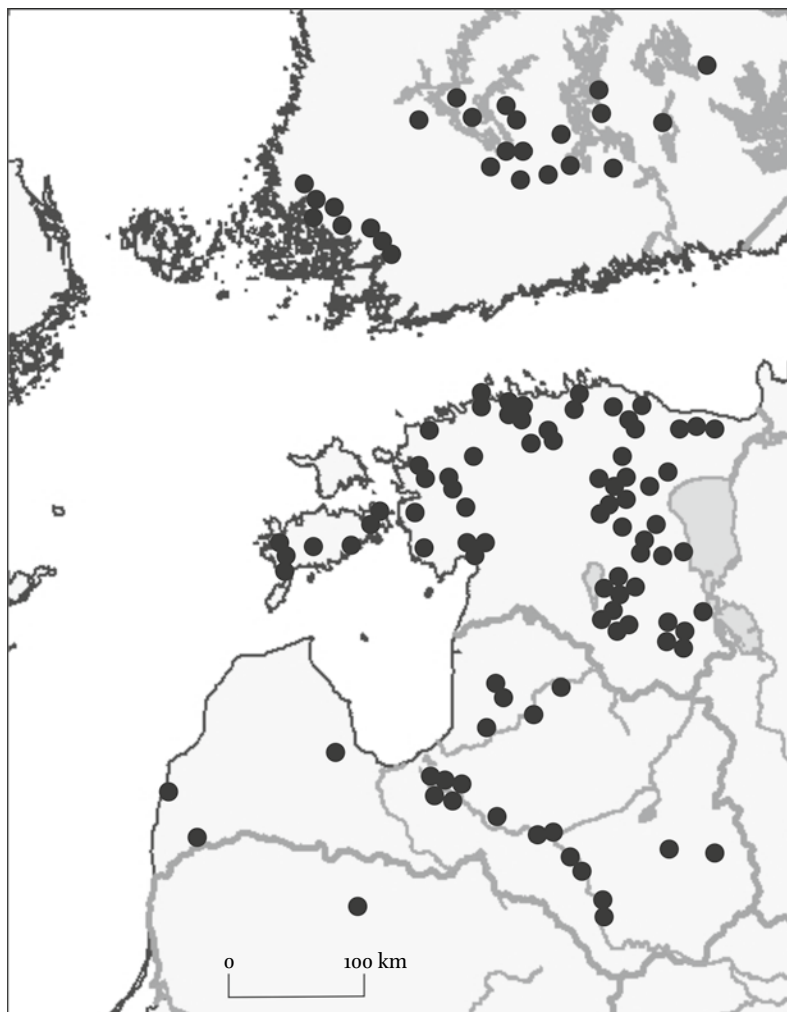


FIGURE 7.19 *11th–12th-century hoards.*

BASED ON: TÖNNISSEN 1962; DUCMANE & OZOLIŅA 2009: 76–77; DUKSA 1981; TALVIO 2002, MAPS 2, 3; KIUDSOO 2007; KIUDSOO & RUSSOW 2011; KIUDSOO & LEIMUS 2014.

Mercantile contacts between Sweden and Russia in the 11th–12th centuries can serve as another example. Although these contacts were frequently mentioned in written sources, traces of them in coin finds were sparse: only a modest number of coins minted in Russia have been found in Sweden. A similar situation characterises the distribution of Polish coins, of which only a couple of dozen are known in Sweden.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Jonsson 2009.

As for dirhams, the greatest number of them in northern Europe was found in the present-day Russia. The distribution of Western European coins demonstrates a somewhat different pattern (Diagram 7.1).

Predictably, fewer Western European coins reached Russia, compared with dirhams. The number of coins was still high in mainland Sweden and Gotland. As for the Eastern Baltic, the 11th–12th-century situation was approximately the same as before, but the abundance of coins in Estonia, particularly in comparison with other areas, was even more striking than in the Viking Age. Western European coins from predominantly the 11th and 12th centuries have been found in Estonia in twice the numbers found in Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland together. The most obvious local changes in the region embraced Åland and the basin of the Daugava River. The 11th–12th-century coins were totally absent on the archipelago of Åland, which used to be distinguished by abundant dirham finds in the Viking Age. Around the Daugava River, in contrast, several hoards consisting of coins were buried in the 11th–12th centuries, while the number of dirhams in the same area had been considerably more modest. In Estonia, 11th–12th-century coins were distributed somewhat more evenly over

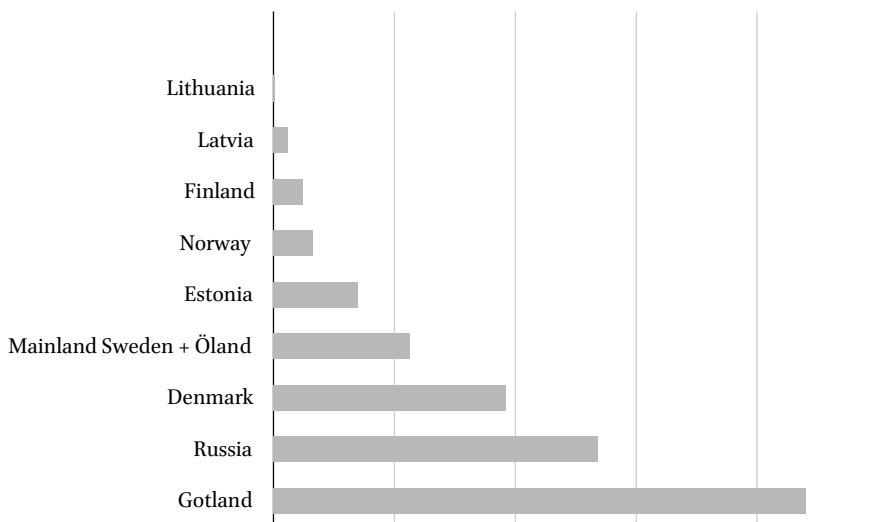


DIAGRAM 7.1 *The distribution of English and German coins in the 11th–12th centuries Only ratios have been shown, since the sources used are from different times and a great number of coins have been found in recent decades, particularly due to metal detecting.*

SOURCES: TALVIO 2002, TABLE 1; DUKSA 1981; LEIMUS 2006.

the country, not mainly marking the most relevant trade routes, as they had done before.

As was demonstrated earlier, the 11th–12th centuries can be described as the period of intensive long-distance trade on the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea, but to a certain extent also in Gotland. Large hill-forts and sometimes complexes consisting of a hill-fort and a settlement bloomed in this time on the north Estonian coast, and a similar centre was established in Lihula in west Estonia. On the island of Saaremaa, the big Pöide hill-fort was rebuilt and fortified again in the 12th century. Several big Estonian hill-forts near or in the middle of wetlands were erected or became intensively used in the second half of the 11th century. In the same period, the population increased and the fortifications were strengthened on several hill-forts on the Daugava River.

The same development also characterised Couronia, where some big complexes consisting of a hill-fort and a large settlement emerged in the 11th century, for example at Talsi.¹⁷⁷ Most of these centres were situated inland, and were connected with the coast via some river (Figure 7.20.). As was demonstrated by excavations at Palanga and Žardė in the 1990s, large trading places also existed right on the Couronian coast, and were brought into intensive use in the second half of the 11th century as well.

The big changes on the cultural landscapes of the Eastern Baltic suggest the increasing importance of local trading activities since the mid-11th century. The main difference from Viking Age communication seems to be the clearly diminished role of Scandinavians, even though contacts with the western coast of the sea certainly did not disappear. An important exception may have been Gotland, whose topographic location in the middle of the Baltic Sea was remarkably favourable for mediating contacts between the east and the west. Trade on the eastern coasts was, starting from the middle of the 11th century, mainly interregional and characterised by close relations with Russian principalities, and, especially on the present-day Lithuanian coast, also with Prussia and Poland.

To illustrate the situation in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, settlements excavated on the banks of Lake Beloye in Viking Age *Austrvegr* in the present-day north-west Russia provide a good parallel. Although finds referring to Scandinavian contacts at these sites ceased abruptly at the beginning of the 11th century, long-distance trade to the area of Lake Beloye seems not to have decreased until the 12th century. The archaeological material from settlement sites in this region included a great number of Western European coins and Eastern Baltic artefacts, in addition to some fragments of Viking Age

177 Asaris *et al.* 2008: 115.



FIGURE 7.20 *The Impiltis hill-fort in Lithuanian Couronia.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY M. MÄGI.

Scandinavian items.¹⁷⁸ The trade to these inland northern areas was based mainly on fur, and can, at least starting from the 11th century, be considered mainly as barter exchanges between the Eastern Baltic and the Lake Beloye region, although the fur could of course have been shipped further to Western Europe. The fur trade in the district of Lake Beloye ceased quite suddenly after the 12th century, which can probably be explained by political factors.

Although the fur trade between the northern areas and the Eastern Baltic thus continued to a certain extent, the most important international trade routes from Scandinavia and Western Europe through Russian areas were from then on the ones heading to Kiev and Byzantium.

7.6.2 *The Baltic Rim Seen from Sicily*

The first geographic description of the Eastern Baltic can be dated to the 12th century. It was presented in so-called *Book of Roger* (*Tabula Rogeriana*), the description of the world from 1154, written by Arabic geographer al-Idrīsī, who worked for Roger II, the king of Sicily. Al-Idrīsī's narrative normally followed

¹⁷⁸ Makarov 2004.

trade routes that in northern Europe were predominantly sea routes, and it was greatly based on information gathered from traders.¹⁷⁹

The scholar himself claimed geographical truthfulness as his main objective, but could still not avoid, at least for the faraway North, stereotyped descriptions of strange customs and unusually shaped humans, or of the Land of Women in the furthest end of the world. For the subject here, al-Idrīsī's story of *Astalānda* land that, according to widespread opinion, denoted the present-day Estonia or the Eastern Baltic in a more general sense, is of main interest. Still, the comparison between al-Idrīsī's description of *Astalānda* land and other countries around the Baltic Sea is by no means less fascinating, reflecting the context of where the Sicilian, according to his knowledge, placed the present-day Estonia.

Although al-Idrīsī's work was certainly progressive for its time, it is not possible to draw more far-reaching conclusions about the size or characteristic features of particular towns or hill-forts based on his narratives. Descriptions of centres in remote northern Europe were far too stereotypical for this. Names of lands given in the book can be recognised and probably refer to roughly the same areas that we know under these names later in history. Names of particular places are much more problematic. Only a handful of al-Idrīsī's place names in Northern Europe can be assumed to be connected with later places; in addition, several place names slightly resemble some well-known toponyms, but then fit badly with the geographic description.¹⁸⁰ Despite this, most historians who have studied al-Idrīsī's book seem to have focused their research predominantly on the place names given in his work.¹⁸¹

In this fourth section of the seventh climate are most of the lands of *ar-Rūsīya* [Russia], lands of *Finmārk* [part of Finland], lands of *Tabast* [Tavastland in Finland?], lands of *Astalānda* [the northern half of the East Baltic?] and lands of *al-Māġūs* [middle part of the Eastern Baltic?]. Most of these lands consist of infertile and sparse fields, of uninhabited villages, of even more expanses of snow. There are only a few towns. As for the land of *Finmārk*, it is rich in villages, arable lands and sheep. But there are no inhabited places except the town of *Ābū'a* [Åbo?] and the town of Oalmār. These are two big towns. Between these two towns one can notice a nomadic way of life and the inhabitants there are particularly

179 Maqbul Ahmad 1992.

180 The problem is especially complicated because al-Idrīsī, who wrote in Arabic, did not use vowels.

181 E.g. Tuulio 1936.

poor. They have less daily bread than they need, and it is raining heavily all the time. From the town of *Oalmār* towards the west to the town of *Sigtūn* [Sigtuna] is a hundred miles. The king of *Finmār*k, as mentioned before, possesses towns and fields in the island [peninsula] of *Nurbāja* [Norway].

From the town of *Oalmār* to the estuary of the other branch of the river *Out(r)ilw* is eighty miles. From the river *Out(r)ilw* to the town of *Daġwāda* is a hundred miles. *Daġwāda* is a big and prosperous town on the sea coast. This town is considered as belonging to the land of *Tabast*. This land has many villages and arable lands. But there are few towns. It is even colder there than in the land of *Finmār*k. Ice and rain nearly never leave them [the inhabitants].

From the town of *Anhū* [or 'nhū] to the town of *Daġwāda* is two hundred miles. *Anhū* is a beautiful, remarkable, wealthy town. It belongs among the towns of the land of *Astalānda*. *Qlūry* also belongs among the towns of *Astalānda*. It is a small town, similar to a big stronghold. Its inhabitants are land cultivators and their income is scanty, but they have many cattle. From the town of *Anhū* to *Daġwāda* in a south-easterly direction is six days' travel. And for the traveller along the coastal road from *Anhū* to the estuary of the *Būnū* river, fifty miles. From this to the town of *Flmūs* on the coast [in some translations: to the coast], a hundred miles. This stronghold is abandoned in winter; its inhabitants run from it to caves that are further away from the sea and find shelter there. They make bonfires there throughout the whole winter; as long as the cold lasts, they let the bonfires burn without a break. When summer arrives, and the fogs disappear from the coast and the rains stop, they return to their stronghold.

From this stronghold to the town of *Madsuna* is thirty miles. The town of *Madsuna* is big, central, wealthy, populous. Its inhabitants the *Māġūs* worship fire. From here to the town of *Sunu*, which belongs to the land of *Māġūs*, seventy miles along the coast. In the land of *al-Māġūs*, at some distance from the sea, is the town of *Kabi*. Between it and the sea [is] six days' travel. From the town of *Kabi* to the town of *Kaluri* is four days' travel. From the town of *Kaluri* towards the west to the town of *Dzhintiar* [is] seven days' travel. It is a big, prosperous town on top of a high hill, where it is impossible to climb up to attack it. The inhabitants find shelter there against nightly attacks by *Rus*. This town is not subject to any ruler.

In the land of *ar-Rūsya* is the town of *Marturi*; it is near the source of the *Danast* river. From the town of *Marturi* to the town of *Sarmali* [is] four days' travel southwards. *Sarmali* is in *Rum* language called *Tuīia*.

Sarmali and *Marturi* belong to the land of *ar-Rūsīya*. *ar-Rūsīya* [is] a big land both in length and in width.¹⁸²

7.6.3 Mercantile Point of View of “Towns” around the Baltic

The description of the *Astalānda* land in al-Idrīsī’s book is mainly noteworthy in an international context. Mid-12th-century Estonia could by no means have been an area with the same international reputation and capacity as for instance, Sweden. Still, Sweden is described in only a little more detail than *Astalānda*, and some places mentioned there seem to fit with names that are known from other sources, which cannot be said for *Astalānda*. There is no doubt that in the 12th century the Kingdom of Sweden was not only considerably bigger than the area of present-day Estonia, but also politically much more influential. Denmark was clearly described more precisely than Sweden, suggesting that the man who informed al-Idrīsī of the countries around the Baltic Sea perhaps came from Denmark. By way of comparison, it could be mentioned that Scotland and Ireland, for example, were described very superficially in the earlier part of the book, and the story of Norway introduced mainly generally Nordic ethnographic peculiarities, without providing the reader with any particular geographical knowledge.

It is interesting to note that al-Idrīsī’s descriptions of “towns” in the Baltic Rim only varied a little, although many Scandinavian 12th-century centres were, unlike their Eastern Baltic counterparts, real towns, often controlled by kings. This seems to hint at the predominantly topographical objectives of the *Book of Roger*, where the mercantile importance of lands and “towns” prevailed over their political influence. Bigger (trade) centres were all described as “prosperous” or “wealthy”, in some cases with a special addition that they were permanently inhabited.

As for the majority of archaeologically detected prehistoric centres on the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea, it is not known what they were called when they were in use. More relevant centres could have several and perhaps totally divergent names in different languages. The following speculation of what places al-Idrīsī might have had in mind in the Eastern Baltic is, therefore, not based on name analysis but on the assumption that al-Idrīsī could only mention places that in reality were internationally known. Such places have most likely either been detected archaeologically or are locatable with methods of cultural geography. Places in the Eastern Baltic that can come under consideration in this respect were described earlier in this chapter, and there was

182 Translated from Norwegian (Birkeland 1954: 75), Russian (Vostochnye istochniki, 127–137) and Estonian (Leimus 1997).

actually only a limited number of them. It is also logical to assume that the communication routes indicated by archaeological evidence were the same ones along which the informant travelled, and which were then followed in the narrative of al-Idrīsī (Figure 7.21.).

The only detectable place names in the areas surrounding Estonia, given in al-Idrīsī's book, were *Siqtūn* (Sigtuna) and perhaps *Ābū* (Turku, in Swedish Åbo).¹⁸³ The town of *Oalmār* 100 miles east of *Siqtūn* could have been some centre in south-west Finland, perhaps the archaeologically known harbour site at Hitis in the archipelago of Turku (see Section 6.2.). *Daġwāda* in the land of *Tabast* remained 100 miles in an unknown direction from the estuary of the river *Out(r)ilw*. The latter probably denoted the entrance to Lake Mälaren, since *Siqtūn* was also situated at the estuary of the river *Out(r)ilw*. It is reasonable to assume that the location of the town of *Daġwāda* was somewhere further north, since the book claimed that it was a colder place than the land of *Finnmārk*. Perhaps it was some so far unknown harbour site at the estuary of either Eura or Kokemäki River, where close contacts with the Mälär area are archaeologically clearly evident. The distance from *Daġwāda* to the town of *Anhū* was claimed to have been quite long, 200 miles, in an unknown direction. Since *Daġwāda* was probably quite far in the north already, the 200 miles can most likely only mean towards the south.

The only "beautiful, remarkable and wealthy town" in the *Astalānda* land was *Anhū* that seems to have been on the seashore, and one travelled there from present-day Finland. Following the archaeological evidence, the only possible candidate on the 12th-century north Estonian coast is Tallinn/*Rafala*; the complex of Purtse on the north-eastern coast of the country remained too far away for someone sailing from Finland and using the most common route. In any case, a little more than 60 years after the publication of al-Idrīsī's book, in 1219, Tallinn/*Rafala* was chosen by the Danish king Valdemar II, not only for the landing place of his navy, but also the site for his future centre in north Estonia, in this way indirectly emphasising the relevance of Tallinn.

Another "town" that was presumably situated on the territory of present-day Estonia was *Qlūry*.¹⁸⁴ According to al-Idrīsī's description, it was an inland town, and could denote, for instance, Tartu. The river of *Būnū* could have been

183 The town of Turku was established only at the end of the 13th century (Hiekkänen 2003b). If al-Idrīsī's *Ābū* really denoted Turku, the name must have been moved over from some earlier settlement. Several late prehistoric centres are known in the vicinity of Turku.

184 Qlūry has been often believed to have denoted Tallinn, because the word has a certain similarity with the Old Russian name for Tallinn – Kolyvan. Ivar Leimus has convincingly demonstrated that the suggestion is probably not true (Leimus 1997).

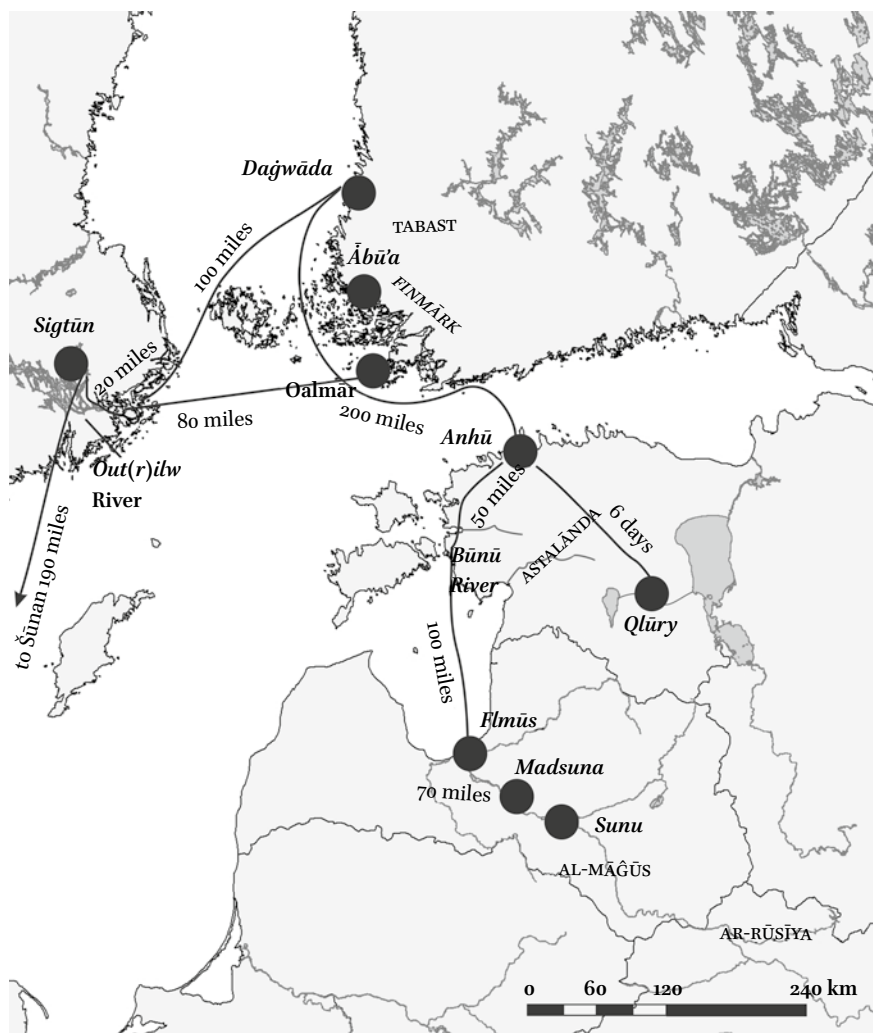


FIGURE 7.21 Possible places and distances mentioned in al-Idrisi's book.

the Pärnu or Kasari River, which both formed parts of communication routes through central Estonia. An interesting detail that can be noted in this context is that al-Idrisi did not mention any "town" on the estuary of the *Būnū* river, as was common for other rivers in his North European narratives. The lower reaches of both Kasari and Pärnu are wetlands or infertile lands, where there were really no centres in prehistory.

The stronghold of *Flmūs* remained, according to al-Idrisi's description, quite far, 100 miles, from the river of *Būnū*, and may not necessarily have been in the

present-day Estonia. The Eastern Baltic was, for the 12th-century geographers, probably divided according to languages, and the land of *Astalānda* could therefore embrace not only present-day Estonia, but also a considerable part of Latvia – that inhabited by Livs and other Baltic Finnic-speaking people. The town of *Flmūs* could even have been 12th-century Riga, a Livic assembly place that was presumably also connected with trade. There are several caves in the Livic area north of Riga, some of them considered to have been cult places, which could inspire the story of people living in caves in wintertime and gathering in *Flmūs* only in summer.

The “big and populous town” of *Madsuna* 30 miles away from *Flmūs* could have been Daugmale or, even more likely, Aizkraukle. *Madsuna* was, according to al-Idrisi, a sort of border-town – some *Māġūs* people lived there, but only the following “town”, *Sunu*, belonged to the land of *Māġūs*. *al-Māġūs* was a widespread term used by Arabic scholars for pagans, “the worshippers of fire”, and was probably also used as such in this description.¹⁸⁵ As for the Eastern Baltic, the differentiation between *Astalānda* and *Māġūs* seems to have denoted the border between Baltic Finnic and Baltic languages.

The way from *Madsuna* to *Sunu* again ran, according to al-Idrisi’s informant, along the coast. It is, however, possible that the big Daugava River was frequently considered to be a strait. Saxo Grammaticus most probably called it *Hellespont* which is actually a strait, not a river, and in Baltic Finnic languages the Daugava River is called *Väina* as well (Estonian *väin* – “strait”). The basin of the Daugava River, which in the 12th century was an internationally well-known communication route, contained several Latgallian complexes of hill-forts and settlements that could have been denoted by the name *Sunu* – e.g. Koknes or Jersika. When, on the other hand, travelling from the estuary of the Daugava River to Couronia along the sea coast, no archaeologically detected 12th-century centres are known until the present-day Lithuanian coast. What is more, travellers from the town of *Sunu*, who moved along al-Idrisi’s “coast”, arrived in the land of *ar-Rūsīya*, Russia, where one really arrived along the Daugava River. The last “towns” mentioned in al-Idrisi’s text here were probably some places in the princedom of Polotsk. The Russian princedoms and towns, probably including Kiev (*Kūyāba*) and Novgorod (?*Slava*) were described in a much more detailed way in the fifth and sixth parts of the sixth climate of al-Idrisi’s book.¹⁸⁶

Although the *Book of Roger* certainly cannot be used as truthful source material, some logical features in the description of the Eastern Baltic should

185 Vostochnye istochniki, 135.

186 Vostochnye istochniki, 129–135.

not be overlooked either. First of all, the general trend of the book was clearly demonstrated – only communication routes and centres that were relevant to the informant with a presumably south Scandinavian background were paid attention to. These were places in present-day Estonia and the northern part of Latvia as far as the Daugava River, which correlates well with other indicators of trade in the 12th century.

7.7 Conclusions

The 11th–12th-century Eastern Baltic was quite evenly covered with archaeological evidence, which was a big change from the Viking Age, when the northern half of the region lacked almost any burials with grave goods. Still, certain differences between the burial customs in the northern and the southern half of the Eastern Baltic remained to some extent. Estonia and Finland were mainly characterised by intermingled collective cremations in stone graves without formal structure, while the ethnic Balts either inhumed or cremated their dead individually. Burials were also individual among the Livs who otherwise culturally belonged together with other Baltic Finns. Still, in a certain region in Finland inhumations dominated even earlier, and in the 11th century the custom of inhumation also gradually spread in other areas of present-day Estonia and Finland.

The spread of inhumations may have been more or less directly influenced by Christianity. The new faith was adopted in south-west Finland as early as the 11th century, but up to two centuries later in Eastern Finland and Karelia.¹⁸⁷ Estonia and Latvia were Christianised as result of crusades in the course of the 13th century, while Lithuania, where a state had formed in the early Middle Ages, converted to Christianity on the initiative of their own kings.

The long-lasting resistance against Christianity in the Eastern Baltic is a much-discussed subject, where no clear or generally accepted explanations have been presented so far. It is most probable that the situation was dependent on several factors. Still, one of the reasons for staying heathen so long may have been the location of the region between two religions and two political powers, or more precisely groups of political powers, as was described in this chapter. In the 12th century the east was ruled by Orthodox Russia, which had by then been divided into practically independent princedoms, and in the west and south-west there were Scandinavian, German, and Polish states with

187 Hiekkänen 2003a: 10–15.

Catholic faiths. The acceptance of one or another religion might have meant alliance with the respective political side.

As we have tried to demonstrate in Chapter 7, trade and especially transit trade seem to have played an essential role in the economy of the 11th–12th-century Eastern Baltic. The heathen and politically fragmented Eastern Baltic formed a sort of buffer zone between the east and the west, which was able to trade with both sides. However, at the end of the 12th century, at the time of the strengthening ideology of Baltic Sea crusades, new obstacles to trade with pagans were invented, especially by the Papal Curia. These were the first signs predicting the end of one era in the Baltic Rim.

As was obvious for the Viking Age, disagreement between archaeological evidence and written sources often also characterised the 11th–12th centuries. The role of Scandinavians in 11th-century Russia, or the conquest of Sigtuna can serve here as suitable examples. Some contradictions were also obvious in purely archaeological matters. Hill-forts with large adjacent settlements in many parts of Latvia, probable pre-urban centres frequently connected with trade, are often at variance with the far fewer coins and imported items found in these areas, when compared with Estonia. One possible explanation is the clear difference in interpretations and research traditions, which seems to favour the importance of trade in Latvia and Lithuania, but nearly overlooks the meaning of prehistoric mercantile contacts for Estonia.

Archaeological evidence in the 11th–12th-century Eastern Baltic is so abundant and multiform that what was presented here in Chapter 7 can only be taken as a comparatively superficial overview. However, the period was so directly connected with the Viking Age that the latter cannot be properly discussed without including the processes and changes in the following period. These centuries were also the last era before the Eastern Baltic was united with the Western European cultural sphere, which brought new religion and severe alterations to local cultures. Lithuania built up, in union with Poland, an independent great power, while Estonia and Latvia became states consisting of districts belonging to numerous, often ecclesiastical overlords, which were formally united with Germany, but practically quite independent. Northern Estonia belonged to Denmark till mid-14th century. Finland became a district of the Swedish state. Nevertheless, most of the topographic factors, as they were described in this book, remained the same, with the result that processes in international trade and communication routes similar to those of the Viking Age could be also detected sometimes much later in history.

Summing up and Conclusions

Writing this book has been a long-lasting process, in course of which several points of view have crumbled, even if some of them seemed unshakable in the beginning. The present-day Baltic States is an area where conceptions, ideologies, and beliefs from all possible directions meet each other, probably on a larger scale than in many other areas of the same size. As for Viking Age communication, the Eastern Baltic countries have traditionally been considered more or less irrelevant peripheries, looking from both east and west. In reality, it was rather a buffer zone between the east and the west. It was there where influences from the large inland areas of the present-day Russia met the maritime cultures of the Baltic Sea, and where connections were created for building up the Viking Age eastern trade networks that made possible the inflow of dirhams to Northern and Western Europe. All North European routes in the communication between east and west ran through the Eastern Baltic.

Scholars of the Baltic States have only too often treated Viking Age communication from the perspective of national states, projecting contemporary political situations back to a time more than a thousand years ago. Or is it, perhaps, not the completely wrong attitude after all? Language differences largely hinder mutual cultural contacts between the Baltic States in our time, and presumably did so even more, back in history. To limit the scope of one's study to the boundaries made up by modern political borders, as we find them today, hampers our understanding of prehistoric processes from a time when those states had not yet been established. Ethnic entities and language groups crossed present states, thus leaving little room for some modern nation states to mirror themselves back in time.

The present book is an attempt to observe the Viking Age Eastern Baltic across the region, involving all available sources to characterise this epoch. A great part of the attitude adopted comprised logistical and topographic approaches, largely including geographical knowledge for drawing out realistic possibilities for how prehistoric communication could have been accomplished. The trans-regional approach has hopefully also justified itself when treating archaeological and historical source material. The change of perspective can alter the general picture beyond recognition. Several aspects, phenomena or finds that may seem most relevant from the national point of view, may not necessarily be so in a broader perspective, or *vice versa*.

8.1 Two Cultural Spheres in the Eastern Baltic

Although several similarities in the Eastern Baltic archaeological evidence can certainly be pointed out, there are quite as many differences. In addition to very clear variability in, for instance, grave or artefact types, there are some more general differentiating features. Particularly clear is the variability in burial customs, together with different aspects expressed through them, for instance gender systems, or the collective or individual attitude of a society.

The interpretation of late prehistoric society, which only some decades ago was stereotyped and actually nondescript in all the Baltic States, has changed remarkably during the last 20 years. In most countries on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea new, innovative, and sometimes even contradictory visions of the pre-state social systems have been suggested. According to the interpretation in this book, in the Viking Age the northern, Baltic Finnic half of the Eastern Baltic was characterised by corporate power structures, which presumably differed quite considerably from the more hierarchical societies of the ethnic Balts with individually arranged political power. Another social difference embraces gender systems that seem to have been more egalitarian in the northern half, when compared with the southern half of the Eastern Baltic. It is even possible to assume matrilineal descent systems in some of the Baltic Finnic societies. Burial customs and grave goods suggest that warrior status was not particularly emphasised in Estonian and Livic societies before the second half of the 10th century.

Social systems are certainly one of the factors behind the methods that a society chooses for interaction with its neighbours. Here, too, two different patterns can be distinguished in the Viking Age Eastern Baltic, especially when overseas communication and contacts with Scandinavia are involved. The only Scandinavian colonies in the Eastern Baltic are known from areas inhabited by ethnic Balts – in Grobiņa and Kaup. The first stopped functioning as a colony as early as the beginning of the Viking Age. At these sites a number of burials, both male and female, have been unearthed, with grave goods that were unusual in surrounding areas but common in Scandinavia. The Scandinavian influence on the material culture of the surrounding areas, on the other hand, remained modest, and was expressed only by some selected, probably imported artefacts. Such a model of colonialism, based on socially complex immigration, is in the book classified as “middle ground colonialism”.

Quite a different type of cultural colonialism can be found in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic that was, and still largely is, inhabited by Baltic Finns. No complex colonies of Scandinavians have been found in these areas, but the Scandinavian impact in one particular sphere – that of warriors – was

remarkably strong in coastal districts. Such a phenomenon can be classified “shared cultural values” and sometimes described as colonialism without colonies. Despite the lack of colonies with socially complex immigrants, the cultural impact on surrounding societies can be described as stronger and certainly longer-lasting than was characteristic of “middle ground colonialism”.

The distribution of different cultural colonialism types in the northern and southern halves of the Eastern Baltic was probably supported by topography and natural conditions. The Estonian and Finnish coastlines are many, even more than ten times, longer than those of Latvia and Lithuania, and the coast is very indented. In addition, the most intensively used routes to the Eastern Way run along the south-west Finnish and Estonian coasts. The local coastal cultures were very maritime-oriented, at least according to written sources, and thus a considerable power at sea. All this promoted partnership and treaty-based contacts with Scandinavians, which was probably the main reason for the development of the shared cultural sphere.

8.2 The Shared Cultural Sphere of Warriors

The Scandinavisation of the martial sphere on most of the coastal areas inhabited by Baltic Finnic peoples intensified in the 8th century, but had begun to take shape much earlier in some districts along the Finnish coast. The great majority of weapons on the Estonian and Finnish coasts belonged to the same types as weapons in Middle Sweden or Gotland, even though some specific Finnish-Estonian features in warriors’ jewellery were obvious at the beginning of the Viking Age. Later, most warriors’ attributes, for example ornaments and belt fittings, started to resemble Eastern Scandinavian ones as well.

In addition to weapons and other warrior attributes, coastal Baltic Finnic peoples also adopted Nordic Animal Art. The first examples of Animal Art on local jewellery types, as well as local derivations of these styles, can also be dated to the 8th century. In particular, many examples of locally developed Nordic art styles are known from the second half of the 10th century, when Baltic Finnic inhabitants in the Eastern Baltic also started to deposit artefacts as grave goods. Weapons decorated with the Urnes Style are predominantly found in Finland, Estonia, and the Livic areas. As was characteristic of Eastern Scandinavian weapon types, Animal Art also decorated mainly artefacts that probably belonged to warriors. Still, in some particular areas, notably among Livs and Karelians, Scandinavian oval brooches were also adopted by local women, and developed further.

It is not clear whether the adoption of artefactual culture and art styles indicates that parts of ideology and mythological culture were also adopted.

Estonian and Livic folklore is very female-dominated, and subjects connected with warriors are only marginal. Nevertheless, in all probability the development of the common cultural sphere also included some migration, although apparently without movements of socially complex groups. Warriors in the service of chieftains in different lands and people connected with trade were probably those most likely to settle down in foreign countries.

In any case, the shared cultural sphere presumed a sort of *lingua franca*, which was probably some Old Norse dialect or a pidgin-language based on Old Norse and Baltic Finnic dialects. Legendary sagas that probably reflect, more or less hazily, some old events that happened at the beginning or even before the Viking Age, recount *Austrvegr* as something resembling the Vikings' own society. When persons in *Austrvegr* are mentioned, their names sound Scandinavian. Languages and understanding each other never seem to be problematic in these narratives. The situation, however, changed in the 11th century, when the now Christian Scandinavians' attitudes towards the still pagan peoples in the Eastern Baltic clearly turned more disapproving.

Although the phenomenon of a common martial sphere in the coastal areas of the northern half of the Baltic Sea should be most relevant for interpreting Viking Age communication, it has not been seen to merit enough attention so far. A quite widespread attitude among researchers is that the phenomenon can be explained away by "ordinary" cultural contacts, that is, by the assessment that some artefacts under question were imports from Scandinavia, others perhaps produced locally after Scandinavian examples. In such attitudes, the visions of a "Baltic average", that is, lack of knowledge of variable cultures in the Eastern Baltic, probably play a major role. As for Viking Age and 11th-century Estonia, the inland cultural sphere was clearly different from the coastal one, and Scandinavian cultural connections were much less obvious in inland districts. Despite this, the territory of present-day Estonia is frequently considered one cultural unit in prehistory, even by several Estonian archaeologists. In coastal Estonia, on the other hand, any kind of "local" warrior attributes were nearly absent, and warrior burials can hardly be distinguished from, for instance, Gotlandic ones. The logical conclusion is that what was "local" for a coastal Estonian or coastal Finland warrior was quite the same "local" for a warrior from Middle Sweden or Gotland.

8.3 Written Sources and Places on the Eastern Coasts of the Baltic Sea

The majority of written sources mentioning Viking Age Eastern Baltic have been gathered together in this book. As was demonstrated earlier for the archaeological evidence, the understanding of written sources also changed

remarkably when looking at them from a trans-regional perspective. The first surprise was to find out how much more frequently the northern half of the Eastern Baltic was mentioned in certain kinds of sources, when compared with the southern half, although in many cases the remarks only consisted of brief descriptions of plundering raids or similar. The observation, nevertheless, contradicts the widespread view in Estonian historiography, according to which Estonia was only seldom mentioned in the Nordic sagas.

Comparing different sorts of written sources with each other, it is very evident how differently Eastern Baltic place names were used in them. The best example here is probably the frequent mention of Saaremaa (*Eysýsla*) in Nordic sagas written down by Snorri Sturluson or by other, unknown writers, as well as in the *History of Norway*, while a district called *Kúrland* was very seldom mentioned in these sources. Opening the work of Saxo Grammaticus, the picture changes remarkably. In his writings, *Kúrland* or its inhabitants were very often referred to, while *Estland* could only be found from some lists of countries and *Eysýsla*-Saaremaa was not mentioned at all. At the same time, stories in Saxo's first nine books often seem to be based on old legends or narratives similar to those found in Icelandic sagas. It is clear that the use of Eastern Baltic toponyms has varied in different countries, eras, or the usage of different authors. Most Scandinavians were probably unaware of where exactly these lands were situated on the eastern coasts of the sea.

Several toponyms have denoted different areas at different times. The place name *Estland* probably serves here as the best example. In several centuries before the Viking Age it presumably denoted all or most of the Eastern Baltic coast, but was used mainly for some area in the present-day Estonia since the Viking Age. The toponyms *Kúrland* and *Sámland* seem to have been partly overlapping, especially when both names also exist or have been historically used for Saaremaa, although with the suffix -island. To make it even more complicated, *samit* has denoted Baltic Finnic inhabitants in medieval and early modern Couronia, and a peninsula in historical Prussia was also called *Samland*. In Latvia, there is a district Semgallia that was probably referred to as *Semland* or *Sámland* in Norse sagas as well.

Quite a lot of space in the book was filled by discussion of the term *Garðaríki*, which, since the 11th century, denoted Russia. In Saxo's work, the name *Ruthenia* was used for what was probably *Garðaríki* in old stories, or sometimes perhaps *Austrvegr*. Saxo, who wrote in Latin, had obviously translated Old Norse names according to his own geographical knowledge, and in the late 12th century there was a political power called Russia in the east. Most researchers believe that *Austrvegr* (or sometimes *Austrríki*), the Eastern Way, denoted the Eastern Baltic and especially the northern and central part of it. Sometimes, however, the name has also been used in a broader meaning, for "the East".

In historical sagas that talk of events that happened at a time after the end of the 10th century, *Garðaríki* really denotes only Russia, in the north-western part of the country approximately the same areas as in our times. Nevertheless, the meaning of *Garðaríki* seems to have been more ambivalent in the legendary sagas that more likely mirror conditions in the pre-Viking period or the first half of Viking Age. In these narratives, which Saxo apparently also used in writing the first nine books of his opus, *Garðaríki* is clearly an area characterised by a strong maritime culture. Viking kings arrange regular raids to *Garðaríki*, and the chieftains of *Garðaríki* (or, in Saxo's book, *Ruthenia*) sail and fight with other Vikings on the Baltic Sea.

The northern half of Kiev-Rus, as well as the later Russia, was a predominantly inland area, where, because of its topography, it is difficult to arrange continual plundering raids with ships. Russia's own maritime power on the Baltic Sea was nothing remarkable, at least according to early medieval written sources. The princes of Novgorod were inclined to undertake their campaigns in wintertime and over frozen land, not in summer with ships, at least not with sea-sailing navies. There is no doubt that Vikings attacked some places in present-day north-west Russia, for instance Staraya Ladoga, but there is not many data about Viking raids further inland in this part of the country. The north-western coast of present-day Russia is mainly wet and infertile land, where the population was and still is sparse. Rivers in north-western Russia that are now, owing to the sinking of the land mass, much bigger than in the Viking Age, had numerous rapids and were difficult to pass through. Modern experiments have demonstrated that for a great part of a journey along these rivers, boats literally needed to be carried. It is really difficult to imagine Vikings making regular plundering raids to these rare villages.

The vision supported in this book is that early Viking Age *Garðaríki* did not simply include areas in present-day Russia, but also in Estonia and Latvia. First of all, eastern Estonia, including the north-eastern coastal districts in Virumaa, seems to be a suitable candidate because of its extensive arable lands and rich archaeological evidence. Other Estonian districts frequently mentioned in Nordic sagas were *Eysýsla* (or Saaremaa, together with other Estonian islands) and *Aðalsýsla*. The latter embraced western and north-western districts of coastal Estonia. Whether the most influential district in north-west Estonia, *Rafala* around the present-day Tallinn, was also counted under the term *Garðaríki* at some point is uncertain, but quite plausible.

The meanings of Eastern Baltic place names in Nordic sagas interconnect in many aspects with the problem of the names *Rus'* and *Chud'* in early medieval Russian chronicles. As for the latter, the interpretation given in the

book suggests that the original meaning denoted inhabitants in inland Estonia and Virumaa, who formed a part of *Garðaríki*. The name *Chud'* was extended to all Estonians only in the 12th century, and to most Baltic Finnic peoples even later. According to the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, the *Chud'* participated actively in the foundation of the state in Kiev-Rus. The story of three brothers who were invited from "over the sea" by several people, among others the *Chud'*, although just a myth, may include some originally true elements. The relationship between the *Chud'* and the Russian princedoms turned from friendly to antagonistic comparatively abruptly around 1000 AD, when political power in Russia consolidated and the princes were Slavonised.

The standpoint that Eastern Baltic toponyms mentioned in written sources should be taken as ambivalent information enables us to see several Viking Age events and whole processes from a different point of view. First of all, many geographic anomalies that seem to characterise some narratives suddenly appear logical, and, in many cases, the role of the Eastern Baltic in east-west communication can be reconsidered. The latter is particularly true for pre-Viking and early Viking period interaction.

It is also important to note that when talking of Viking Age Baltic Sea communication, written sources from one period have frequently and without further thought been used to illustrate some other centuries. For instance, the story of how Swedes conquered the hill-forts of *Seeburg* (Grobīņa) and *Aputra* has often been used to demonstrate the importance of Couronia in the Viking Age. It is archaeologically proven, however, that the Scandinavian colony in Grobīņa disappeared in mid-9th century at the latest and, after that, Scandinavians seem to have lost their special interest in the historic Amber Way, the route that ran via Grobīņa. On similar lines, the post-11th century meaning of *Garðaríki* has normally been projected onto earlier centuries, thus excluding the role that some parts of the present-day Estonia and Latvia must presumably have played in the formation of it.

8.4 Different Periods in the Viking Age

Considering evidence in the Eastern Baltic in a broader perspective and in comparison with surrounding areas, a division into three major periods is obvious. The first of them covers the last centuries before the Viking Age together with the first half of the 9th century. The second is the long 10th century, that is, the period from approximately the second half of the 800s to the beginning of the 11th century. The third is actually a post-Viking period, covering the 11th

and 12th centuries. It can be estimated, with some generalisation, that for communication through the Eastern Baltic, the first period was dominated by local peoples, the long 10th century saw a boom in Scandinavian influence, and the last period was marked by the gradually strengthening influence of Russian princedoms. In the northern half of the Eastern Baltic, the eastern influence was frequently indicated by numerous military conflicts, while parts of the southern half of the region were characterised by a very strong cultural impact.

The three periods were distinguished by the domination of different internationally favoured trade routes. The increasing relevance of the Eastern Way along the south-western Finnish and Estonian coasts can be observed as early as the last centuries before the Viking Age. It was indicated not only by imported artefacts but also by the appearance of several complexes consisting of hill-forts and adjacent settlements along the north Estonian and Saaremaa coasts. It was the time when the common cultural sphere of warriors started to take shape, as is remarkably indicated by two boat graves found at Salme on Saaremaa, where local and Scandinavian burial customs were intermingled. Along the Couronian and south-eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea the Amber Way blossomed at the same time. As on the Eastern Way, the increasing interest of Scandinavians was obvious on the Amber Way, too, and indicated above all by the foundation of the Scandinavian colony at Grobiņa.

In the middle of the 9th century the international importance of the Amber Way decreased, or at least Scandinavians lost their interest in this route. The east Swedish colony at Grobiņa was abandoned or the inhabitants forced to leave, and not many Scandinavian artefacts have been recorded in Couronia after that. The use of the Eastern Way, in contrast, gained momentum in the same period, as is indicated by all the oriental silver coins that have been found in countries around the Baltic Sea. Scandinavian activity on the Eastern Way increased considerably, and this was a process that seems to have caused several violent reactions, despite the common cultural sphere of warriors. The violence is hinted at by the fact that several Baltic Finnic control centres, for instance Iru or Ljubscha were burnt down or abandoned. Similar processes probably took place on the banks of the Daugava River, where new hill-forts were built and old hill-forts further fortified around 900 AD.

Scandinavian hegemony in present-day Russia was at its peak in the 10th century, from which time several of their colonies are known. As for the Eastern Baltic in the same period, the spread of dirhams along the north Estonian coast and the route through rivers and wetlands in central Estonia was conspicuous, while markedly less oriental silver has been recorded in the rest of the region. The number of Kufic coins along the Daugava River was comparatively modest too, when compared to Estonia, suggesting that this route that

predominantly led to Kiev and Byzantium had not yet gained such importance as in following centuries.

The time of Scandinavian hegemony in Russia ended, at least according to archaeological evidence, quite abruptly at the beginning of the 11th century. The inflow of dirhams to the western and southern coasts of the Baltic Sea stopped in the course of the second half of the 10th century, although they were still being imported to the Eastern Baltic and Russia at the beginning of the 11th century. At the same time as several trading posts around the Baltic Sea were being abandoned, quite a number of hill-forts and settlements along the north Estonian coast, as well as in inland Estonia, also stopped being used. It was only in the second half of the 11th century that the old centres in Estonia were replaced by new and normally much stronger hill-forts.

According to sagas and other written sources the beginning of the 11th century was the time when Scandinavian states, particularly Sweden, and Russian princedoms fought for political dominance in the northern half of the Eastern Baltic. Campaigns of Novgorod and Pskov princes to present-day inland Estonia, which began in the same time, illustrate these political ambitions well. In the middle of the 11th century, the Russian raids reached as far as coastal Estonia, *Syslar*, but met strong resistance and stopped for half a century. Although relevant written sources are rare, the strengthening of Polotsk hegemony over the route along the Daugava River, in the areas inhabited by Livs and Latgalians, can hypothetically be dated to the 11th century, too.

The 11th–12th centuries saw the supremacy of the Daugava route – the river was without doubt the most essential itinerary through the Eastern Baltic in this time, although all other routes known from earlier periods were certainly in use, too. Numerous hill-forts are known and excavated on the banks of the river, some of them taking shape as early urban centres with several hectares of large adjacent settlements. New trading centres were also established on the Estonian and Lithuanian coasts, and several big hill-forts appeared in the border areas between arable lands and the central Estonian large wetland zone. The latter probably functioned as trading centres as well, as their location on the meeting points of winter and summer itineraries seems to indicate. Trade between the Eastern Baltic and areas further east blossomed especially in the second half of the 11th and 12th centuries, but the role of Scandinavians in this was now considerably smaller than before.

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To end with, I would like to point to some essential, although probably not completely unknown aspects that appeared when writing this book. First of

all, it really astonished me how widely written sources still prevail over archaeological evidence. The version based on written history is nearly always preferred in more generalising overviews, and this is true even in cases when documents or narratives talk of different times than the archaeological material of the particular period, or are simply illogical. In this book, written sources have been used and referred to very intensively. I have still tried to base my own final conclusions predominantly on archaeological evidence and on topographic and logistical calculations. How well I have succeeded in doing so, is for readers to judge.

Secondly, I was somewhat surprised at the extent to which concepts of Viking Age communication over the Baltic Sea are still connected with national sentiment and with several more or less national-romantic attitudes. The most conspicuous were certainly differences in interpretation between the eastern and the western schools of archaeology and history studies. Reading publications written by Russian and Scandinavian scholars on more or less the same Viking Age processes or phenomena, it is difficult to overlook the differences in attitudes, even though well-explained arguments can be found on both sides. National-romantic attitudes also characterise studies of prehistory in Finland and the three Baltic States. In this book, attention has been repeatedly drawn to examples of how, for instance, quite similar sites or evidence have been interpreted differently in Latvia and Estonia, let alone other, more general variabilities of interpretation in Eastern Baltic countries.

Schools and approaches also vary at times, and are strongly influenced by political environments. Several attitudes, for instance ideas about the development level of Eastern Baltic Viking Age societies or about the cultural influences of these societies, have their roots in the 20th or even 19th century. The same is true for Viking Age communication, its character, and the roles of actors in it. Especially those ethnic groups that have perished or been assimilated in the course of later history are often pushed aside in modern interpretations. What is more, what role particular still-existing peoples may have played in the Viking Age is frequently thoughtlessly constructed according to the economic or political influence of these peoples in the present world. From this comes the motto of the book: he who controls the present controls the past.

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